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LAUNCELOT

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LAUNCELOT

A ROMANCE OF THE COURT OF
KING ARTHUR

BY

LORD ERNEST HAMILTON

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LAUNCELOT

PART I

CHAPTER I

How Sir Launcelot came to the Castle of Corbin in Northumbria

THE midday sun, after gladdening the earth throughout a cloudless day, was stooping redly down towards the great barrier of hills that stands between Northumbria and Caledonia. Spreading green forests, that were yet in some part brown because of the lateness of the spring, stretched far to east and west of the Roman road that cut so straightly through them. Tuneful and blythe, I wot, were the songs of the birds that gladsome day, for, in the month of May, as the saying is, every beating heart that is in any manner a lover, springeth and flourisheth to lusty deeds.

So, on this fair day, along the Roman road, about the hour of evensong, there rode some twoscore spearmen with weariness writ plainly in their carriage, for they bent over their saddles as men who care not what befalleth, so only they may find rest and shelter. One only was there, of all those who rode, who bestrode his horse as though he and weariness had never yet met, and he was but a beardless youth scarce come to manhood. A stone's throw before them all he rode, and ever, as he went, he turned his head lightly this way and that, as though seeking to read aright the story that the country had to tell.

Thus for a while they rode in silence, and then, on a sudden, this young knight turned in his saddle as though weary of his loneliness and cried on high :

" Haviland ! Haviland ! " At which there spurred forward a short, square man of honest countenance and some twoscore years.

" Meseemeth," said the knight, " that to-night must we,

for lack of better, make our beds once again of grasses and moss, for neither castle, manor-house nor hostry can my eye discover."

"As for that, my lord," said the squire, "we need make no such great dole, for what fairer bed could man seek than the moss of the woodlands in the season of the spring."

"Ye speak sooth," said the knight, "but, wit you well, Haviland, that I am right weary of these woods, for that for which I rode northward was worship and adventure, and now have we ridden these fifteen long days and never a spear broken or a sword drawn by any."

"My lord," said Haviland, "full well wot I that your mind inclineth ever unto strokes and buffets, and of such, anon, I dare say that we will have no stint, for they come to most men unbidden; but, as for me, I am in no mind to bid them come before they need, for therein lieth scant profit, but many sore hurts and bruises."

"Well," said the knight, "meseemeth there is no sure road to worship and honour but through buffets and bruises, therefore must he who would win either the one or the other take what God will send him and give back the best he may."

"As for that," said Haviland, "I dare say that there is no knight living but you are able enough for him, to give back as good as he may bestow."

"There you speak but foolishness," said the knight, laughing, "for, as all men wot well, I have been put to the worse this three times in the lists at Camelot."

"Those knights that overbore you shall have their hands full of you within a twelvemonth," said Haviland, "and of that will I ensure them; for, wit you well, my lord, that you are yet far from your full strength."

"That is as God wills," said he; "for trust thou well, Haviland, that those three knights that overbore me are passing good knights of their hands."

As he spoke these words, they came to where the ground rose steeply before them, and, when they had come to the highest part, there, below them, lay a great plain that stretched out, on the one hand, to the sea and, on the other, to the mountains; and, within that plain, very manifest to the eye, rose the towers of two fair castles, one of which stood upon the seashore and the other some two leagues distant to the west.

"This is fallen out as I would have had it," said the knight,

"for of these two fair castles, surely the one or the other must hold adventure for us."

Therewith he drew rein in very plain uncertainty, for, where they stood, the road parted this way and that, and which road to follow with the greater profit no man might rightly tell.

"Haviland," said the knight, "men hold you to be of a shrewd wit; therefore counsel me now truly whether we shall turn our horses to the eastward or the contrary."

"My lord," said Haviland, "for me the nearer castle is ever the better and, inasmuch as that which lieth to the westward is the nearer, my counsel would be that we hie us thither and leave the other for the birds, for, as it seems to me, it standeth upon an island in the sea."

"And therefore, if for no other cause, have I a mind for closer acquaintance," said the knight, "for very sure am I that it holdeth the promise of greater adventure than the other."

"Well," said Haviland, "thither of my counsel and goodwill shall you not ride, for such adventure as it holdeth may we no less profitably make trial of from the nearer castle, after that we are there refreshed and comforted with food and rest."

"And yet may we find rest and shelter in the island castle no less than in the other," said the knight, with all the stubbornness of youth.

"Then must it needs be barren of adventure," said Haviland; "howbeit, my good lord, whither it pleaseth you to lead, there will we follow without further debate, for thereto are we bound."

"Nay," said the knight, "full loth would I be to match my wisdom against yours, Haviland, for you have the older head and the shrewder. Thus, then, shall we choose between these two paths. I will throw my good sword as far as I may before us and whither the point turns that road will we follow."

Therewith he drew his sword and threw it before him with all his might. Swiftly through the air it flew, circling in the sunshine like a beam of silver, till, far away, it fell to earth.

"Jesu!" said Haviland, "saw ever man so great a throw as that? I am held by my fellows to be of some little might but full well wot I that I could not compass such a throw by the half thereof."

Then they all pressed forward together to where the sword lay upon the road and, when they were there come, they saw

that it lay on the ground with its point toward the castle by the sea.

"In this matter," said the young knight, "it would truly seem that my sword and I accord right happily."

"Well then," said the squire, "an that be so, in God's name let us push forward whither the sword guideth us, for I am right weary of the saddle."

So, with that, and without further debate, they set spurs to their horses and took the seaward road, and so, within a while, they came to where the castle stood by the side of the sea. Then were they aware of a long bridge of wood that joined the island with the land, and on the island stood a tall, fair castle. Thus, as they rode toward the bridge, while they were yet a good bow-draft distant from it, there came forth from a lodge near by three bowmen with arrows ready fitted to their bows, who bade them stand.

"Who are ye," they cried on high, "that thus come upon us with so great strength of spears?"

"We be honest men," said Haviland, "that seek harbourage of your lord; for God be my witness that no roof have we had above us these fifteen nights past but the stars of heaven."

"And wit you well that, for such harbourage as we may have of your lord," said the young knight, "for that will we do him such service soever as we may, so it be but honourable and knightly."

Now, at these words, the men that stood behind the gateway seemed as it were to be at some debate, speaking low and earnestly each with other, and, presently, one drew forth a horn and sounded a blast upon it, clear and high. Thereupon, at the sound of the horn, there came from the nether end of the bridge a man of great stature, who made toward them with long, quick strides and, when he was there come and had spoken with those other three that were there, then came he to the gate and said:

"Fair sirs, so ye be honest men, as I well believe ye be, then be ye welcome indeed, for wit ye well that here, at this present time, we make great sorrow because of the malice and evil deeds of wicked men whereof we live in dread continually."

"Sir," said the knight, "wit ye well that I am a knight adventurous, and, so there be a remedy for your sorrow in our swords and spears, then will I apply it as best I may, for thereto am I bound by my vows."

"Sir," said the man, "for these words I thank you greatly ; but whether you may remedy our sorrow or not God only knows, for, in honest truth, we are in evil case."

"And God only will know," said the knight, "so long as we tarry here. So cease thy talking, good fellow, and hie thee to thy lord as quickly as thou mayest and bear him word that there is one without who will serve him with forty stout spears in any quest adventurous that may be knightly."

"Fair sir," said the man, "it were best that my lord had knowledge of your name."

"Tell him," said he, "that without is Sir Launcelot du Lac, a knight of the Table Round."

So, with that the man moved away and, presently, he passed from their view within the castle. Within a while he came back to them across the bridge.

"Fair sir," said he, "wit you well that this is the Castle of Corbin, where dwelleth the Earl Pelles, and this message he bade me bear you : We live in perilous times, and bandits and ill-doers overrun the realm. Therefore, my lord, Earl Pelles requires that your spearmen bide where they are, without the gate, while he hath short speech with you."

"With that am I well content," said Sir Launcelot ; and therewith he lighted down from his horse and followed the other through the gateway and across the bridge. So, within a while, they came to a great courtelage wherein were men standing by twos and threes and speaking one with other sorrowfully as though in great heaviness of mind. So these stood aside and watched them curiously as they passed, and, presently, they came to some stone steps and, when they had mounted these, they entered through a doorway into the great hall of the castle. Here Sir Launcelot was aware of a one-legged man who traversed the hall at great speed, leaning upon crutches ; and ever, as he went, he cried aloud as though in some sorrow. So, when he espied Sir Launcelot standing within the hall, this one-legged man came to him with all the speed he might.

"Alas ! fair sir," said he, "here be great sorrow and misery ; wherefore, I pray you, hold me excused of my cries and weeping."

"My lord, Earl Pelles," said Sir Launcelot, "so this sorrow and misery may be in any wise abated, I pray you to cease your weeping and tell me thereof in plain words, for all that

any man may achieve that will I essay for your sake and for the sake of my vows of the Round Table."

"Well then," said Earl Pelles, "I will tell you as well as I am able of the great sorrow that has befallen me. But first I would pray that you do off your helm that you may refresh you with wine, for you have doubtless ridden far and the day is hot."

So then Sir Launcelot unlaced his helm and laid it on the board, and Earl Pelles looked at him and saw that he was but a youth of some eighteen summers and his heart sank within him.

"Alas! fair sir," said he, "what madness is this? for I weened that you had been a knight of full years and now I see clearly that you are but a boy."

"Sir," said Sir Launcelot, "of my few years make you no such heavy dole, for wit you well that there is no knight that liveth that I am adread of, and therefore dress you, sir, to your tale, for a salve for your sorrow will I surely find or else will I die therefor."

Then Earl Pelles looked again and he saw that this young knight was very goodly to look upon, for he was tall and broad of the shoulder and as straight as a young sycamore, and, when he walked, it was as though his feet had wings. So he was in some part comforted and he sat him down at the board near by to Sir Launcelot and then he said:

"Fair sir, for all that you are yet of tender age, I perceive and see clearly that you are a full noble knight and well made withal, and therefore will I no longer hide from you the cause why I make so great dole and sorrow."

Then, for a while, he held further silence, for he might not readily speak for weeping, but, at the last, he said:

"My fair lord, I would have you know that this very day hath Sir Mawrig borne off my only daughter."

"In good sooth," said Sir Launcelot, "this is heavy tidings. But prithee, Sir Earl, why sit you here thus idly when your daughter so greatly needeth succour?"

"Alas!" said he, "it is manifest to all how sorely maimed I be, so that neither may I sit upon a horse nor walk upon my feet. How then can I match me with this Mawrig, whom men call the biggest knight within these marches?"

"Sir," said Sir Launcelot, "will this villain knight do battle for the damsel?"

"As for that," said the Earl, "I know not, for, as seemeth

likely, were Sir Lamorak or Sir Palomides here, he might well hold himself excused; but, with such as he might readily overthrow, he would, as meseemeth, do battle right cheerfully upon a surety that, should he prevail, my daughter would be his!"

"Well then," said Sir Launcelot, "to-morn, so soon as it be daylight, will I seek out this villain knight, that he do battle with me."

"And trust thou well, Sir Knight, that he will not say thee nay."

"Whereof we should rejoice," said Sir Launcelot.

At this the Earl held long silence for, as it seemed to him, as well might a deer battle with a lion as the youth who sat beside him with Sir Mawrig; and, should he fail, as fail he must, then were his daughter lost to him for ever.

"Sir," said he, "I thank thee of thy proffer, which cometh, I feel, of great nobility, but sorely am I adread that all thy goodwill would avail thee nothing against this bandit knight, for he is held to be of no common might, and full loth would I be to have thy death upon my hands."

"As for that," said Sir Launcelot, "dismay you not, Sir Earl; for very sure am I that, by the grace of God, I shall prevail against this villain bandit and succour your fair daughter from her peril. For, wit you well, Sir Earl, that to such deeds are we of the Round Table sworn, and in search of such adventures have I now ridden forth these many days past and therefore, were I now to hold me cowardly aloof, I should be for ever shamed of my knighthood and of my vows."

"Well," said the Earl, "I thank thee, sir, as well as any man may. And now will I let put up your horses and your men in the best wise possible, and, when we have well supped, then can we debate this matter further, for the night is now come, and, till the morn, we may do nothing with profit."

Therewith he smote upon a bell and there came to him the tall man that had brought Sir Launcelot across the bridge.

"Eric," said he, "purvey lodging and meat for this noble knight's company as best you may and stint not, for he proffereth us great service for the rescue of the lady Elaine."

"God grant," said Eric, "that he proffereth not more than he is able for."

"Get you gone," said the Earl hotly, for only too well did these words that Eric spoke accord with his own thoughts,

"and see to it that you make no tarrying, for to-morn there may be great doings toward."

So Eric turned and left them, and then the Earl called Dame Brisen, that was woman to the lady Elaine, and she prepared Sir Launcelot a bath and a rich bed and, when all was ready prepared, those two sat them down to dinner.

Thus, as they ate and drank together, Sir Launcelot told Earl Pelles of himself, how that he was eighteen years of age and had but lately sailed across the seas to Logris at the bidding of King Arthur, and how that, within a while, he had ridden forth from Camelot as a knight adventurous and, for fifteen days, had neither drawn sword nor laid a spear in rest, and now, by the grace of God, was this adventure come to him, wherefrom, as it seemed, he might gain worship and honour.

"Or death," said the Earl.

"Sir," said Sir Launcelot, "that is as God may will, but wit you well that of death I have but little dread, for I hold myself able enough for any knight that beareth life, but it be Sir Lamorak or Sir Palomides or Sir Gawaine, and these three be as yet overmuch for me, for they be all passing good knights of their hands and in their full strength."

"Well," said the Earl, "God keep you an you meddle with Sir Mawrig, for wit you well, Sir Launcelot, that this bandit lord is not of the Round Table fellowship, nor of chivalry hath he any understanding; for ever he fighteth foully, and such as he may overcome he will slay by what means soever he may, sparing none."

"Then," said Sir Launcelot, "will I the more readily slay him; for is it not the part of our fellowship to rid the realm of such as he?"

"Truly," said the Earl, "he is an evil liver and one that oppresses all men."

Then he told Sir Launcelot of how this great sorrow had come upon him. "Sir," said he, "I would have you know that I am a Norseman from the land of Frisia, and this will I not hide from you that, at the battle of Bowden Hill, I fought under Childeric against our most noble King Arthur; and there King Arthur overthrew us utterly, and the greater part of Childeric's host he put to the sword. And, as I lay upon the ground sore wounded, he came to where I was and, wit you well, I looked for quick death, for few there were that he spared that day; but, for some cause, I know not what, he

stood above me with his sword in his hand and looked earnestly upon my face. 'Sir,' said he, 'how are you named?' So I told him that I was Earl Pelles of the Frisian land. 'Will you be baptized?' said he, 'and serve Christ and me faithfully?' 'I will well,' said I. So he bade them lift me and bare me in a litter and, within a while, we came to York, and there we lay throughout Christmastide and there was I healed of my wound. Then, before he departed, King Arthur sent for me and there was I baptized by Bishop Benwin before him and all that were with him. When that was done, I swore fealty to King Arthur upon the Cross, and thereafter he made me knight, but not of the Table Round, for, at that time, the fellowship was not yet made.

"So I was made lord of this Castle of Corbin and of the Castle of Case that lieth some two leagues to the westward and, with these two, went all the lordship of the country of Sarras; and all this did King Arthur, as it seemed, because that it pleased him to find in me some likeness to his father, Uther Pendragon. Thus, for three years, I ruled this land, and then came this Mawrig within our marches, from whence God only knows, but men say from the west. With fifty spears he seized upon the Castle of Case unawares and put to the sword all that he found therein. So, for a twelvemonth past, hath he now laid a heavy hand upon all the King's true liege people within these marches, and levied tallages on the land, to my great misease, for so have I fallen upon evil days; but this Castle of Corbin hath he not as yet essayed for, as well you wot, it standeth upon an island and hath but scant store of riches. Therefore was I not so hard pushed but that ever we had the wherewithal to live. But, alas! fair sir, as my daughter grew in years, she was but ill content with the strait bounds of this poor island, and so she must needs ride upon the land, though, wit you well, Sir Launcelot, I ever warned her therefrom with all the voice I had. Howbeit, maidens are ever wayward and wilful, and she paid none heed to my words, and so—to make a short conclusion—this very day, about the hour of noon, as she rode upon the land with but one in her company, this villain knight burst upon her suddenly with a score of spears and bore her off to his castle, and how to deliver her passeth my poor understanding, for wit you well that there is no stronger castle in all this country than the Castle of Case, and within it he hath a ward of fifty men."

Therewith Earl Pelles ceased from speaking and the tears ran from his eyes, as of a man distraught with sorrow. But within the heart of Sir Launcelot there was great joy, for here, as it seemed to him, had he fallen upon an adventure such as rejoiceth every knightly heart.

"Sir," said he, "leave your weeping, for I promise you, by the faith I owe to Christ, that to-morn, so soon as it be light, I will get me to the Castle of Case and there do battle to the utterance with this traitor knight, and little doubt have I but that I shall put him to the worse and bring you again your daughter, for full many a man is noised abroad to be of great might till he meeteth a good knight and then is he lightly laid to the earth."

"Fair sir," said Earl Pelles, "God grant that you be in the right, and, for your better recompense and upholding in this matter, I here make a vow before God that, so you can overcome this traitor and slay him, I will give into your hand this Castle of Case and all that is therein, to hold for evermore. But trust thou well, Sir Launcelot, that this Mawrig is a full perilous knight."

So thus it was agreed between them, and then those two knights went to their beds; but there, wit you well, they had but short rest, for on the day following, at prime, they set forth all together for the Castle of Case, that is to say, Sir Launcelot with his forty spears and Eric with the thirty that were in the Castle of Corbin; but Earl Pelles went not with them by reason of his infirmity. So they rode, with the sun upon their backs, as fast as their horses might go, and, within a while, there rose up before them the walls of Castle Case, very strong and square, and having a gateway upon every side but upon that which faced the sea, for, on that side, was a steep cliff which fell away sharply to the plain below.

"*Pardie!*" said Sir Launcelot, "that is as fair a castle and as strong as any that mine eyes have yet looked upon. Many a weary month might we lie without those walls and yet win no profit nor worship therefrom."

"Ye speak sooth, my lord," said Eric, "and therefore in no manner of wise, as it seemeth to me, can the lady Elaine be reft from the grip of this Sir Mawrig, but by his overthrow with spear and sword by some bigger knight than he."

"That shall you see anon," said Sir Launcelot, "so he will but come forth and meet me."

Now, at these words, Eric laughed loudly.

"My lord," said he, "in this meseemeth you speak in some part over-large, for, wit you well, this Sir Mawrig is no common man but one before whose spear, as it seems, all men go down as do leaves before the wind."

"Well," said Sir Launcelot, "I will do against him all that I may."

CHAPTER II

How Sir Launcelot did Battle with Sir Mawrig for Earl Pelles

NOW leave we that knight and his spearmen pasturing their horses without the walls and turn to those that were within, and these, wit you well, paid but scant heed to the host that lay without the gates, for in truth they all slept as though they had never slept before and would never again awaken. The greater part of them slept in the great hall, and, in the midst of them all, drunken with wine, lay their great lord, Sir Mawrig, upon the floor, with his head pillowed upon his arm. Round about him lay a score or so of those that called him lord, in strange postures, as though they had been flung here and there about the floor by some great hand. Upon the board stood jars of ale and flackets of wine, and others there were that had been overturned and their contents spilled upon the floor. All told of a riotous night, spent in divers evil fashions.

In his lodging at the south gate, Nawle, the porter, had slept heavily for many long hours, when he suddenly became aware of a great noise that beat in upon his brain and, presently, it was manifest to him that this noise that he heard was the bläre of a trumpet. So, slowly and with much sorrow, he awakened, and then he got him to his feet and looked forth and there, beneath the walls, he espied a horseman that blew upon a trumpet and, beyond him, many more, that lay upon the grass beside their horses. So wearily he climbed to the top of the watch tower and from thence he cried out :

“ Who are ye that thus blow upon trumpets when honest men sleep, and what would ye here ? ”

Then the man that blew the trumpet, who was in truth Haviland, said :

“ Good fellow, I would have you bear this message to your lord ; that we have come hither to this end, that Sir Mawrig either yield up forthwith the person of the lady Elaine, daughter to Earl Pelles, or else that he come forth and do battle for her with the noble knight Sir Launcelot du Lac.”

"Well," said Nawle the porter, "I will bear the message, but what will come of it God only knoweth."

So he turned him about and came to the great hall, and there he found his lord sleeping upon the floor, and, with great pain and labour, he awakened him, whereupon Sir Mawrig flung at him an empty ale-can, and, having so done, sank once more upon the floor and slept.

So the porter came again to the top of the watch tower and cried out to Haviland, who stood below :

"Fair sir, so you would have speech with Sir Mawrig, you must needs abide his awakening, for, as at present, he is fast on sleep and, upon pain of my life, I may not draw near for to awaken him, for often hath he slain men for less."

"Well then," said Sir Launcelot, when Haviland had told him of this, "we must needs await his pleasure, nor in that is there any so great peril, for so long as he sleeps he can work no mischief."

So they lay here and there about the grass, and brake their fast, while the sun rose steeply from the sea, and then, at the last, about the hour of undorne, they suddenly became aware of a big knight, tall and broad, that stood upon the watch tower and cried out in a great voice :

"What do ye here, ye carrion crows, picking and scratching on my land ?"

Thereupon Sir Launcelot got upon his feet and went up to the gateway, bearing his helm upon his arm, for the day was warm.

"Sir," said he, "we be here for the succour of the lady Elaine, daughter to the Earl Pelles, and therefore I require you that you make no longer tarrying but come forth and do battle with me for her person, else would I have you understand that I will lay siege to this castle, if needs be, for a twelvemonth or more, till I have brought it to subjection, and then will I put to the sword all that be therein."

Now, at these words, Sir Mawrig looked down from the walls and he saw that there were, without the gates, full seventy men, well-armed at all points, and full well wist he that within the walls was there no great store of victual for to withstand a siege of many months. Then he looked again upon Sir Launcelot where he stood below him and saw plainly that he was of tender age and very far yet from his full strength ; so he thought within himself : "This is perhaps happily come as I would have it, for this youth will go down

before me as a coney before a greyhound, and then will this damsel be mine, from this time on, by right of battle."

So he came to the wall and called out :

"What is your name, Sir Knight ? " and, when Sir Launcelot had told him, he said :

"Sir, this answer will I make to you. I will come forth and do battle with you upon a covenant that, so I shall prevail against you, then will Earl Pelles leave me in peace within these walls and seek his daughter no more."

"Of that will I ensure you," said Sir Launcelot.

"Sir," said Sir Mawrig, "that will but ill suffice me, for wit you well that, an I prevail against you, you are but a dead man and from dead men I seek no covenant. But get you hence and bring me Earl Pelles and, so he will ensure me this upon his faith, then will I arm me and make no further tarrying."

So Sir Launcelot turned away and came back to where stood Haviland and Eric, and with these he took counsel what had best be done. Then were those three at some debate, for one advised this and one advised that, but, in the end, they were all of one mind and it was agreed between them that Eric should ride back to the Castle of Corbin with two spearmen and that, between them, they should bring back Earl Pelles in a horse-litter.

Thus then it was agreed between them, and so it was told to Sir Mawrig, where he stood waiting upon the wall. And so those three, Eric and the two spearmen, went their ways back to the Castle of Corbin, and then, about the hour of noon, Earl Pelles came, borne between the two spearmen in a horse-litter, and, so soon as he was come near, he cried out to Sir Launcelot :

"Alas ! fair sir, this is but ill done of you, for, as it seemeth to me, only by a miracle can you withstand this big knight, and, should you be discomfited, then, by mine own covenant, is my daughter lost to me for ever. What then shall I do ? "

"Sir," said Sir Launcelot, "wit you well that there is no other remedy to hand, for, should we lay siege to this castle, it may yet withstand us for many months, and then is your daughter in no better case than if I am slain in doing battle for her."

"Ye speak sooth," said the Earl, "and therefore, for lack of better means, will I make the covenant he requireth, though little, I fear me, will it avail us."

And so, in good truth, thought they all but Haviland, who knew full well that, though his young lord had been overborne of divers knights in the lists at Camelot, yet on foot and with the sword was he the master of them all, and so he told those others, but they paid him little heed.

So when they were all resolved what they would do, Earl Pelles bade them bear his litter beneath the walls and there they blew a trumpet till Sir Mawrig came once more upon the watch tower.

"Well be ye come, Earl Pelles," he cried out, "and now would I have you swear by the four Evangelists and by the holy order of knighthood that, when I have slain this stripling knight that struts beneath the walls, you will leave me in peace for evermore with your fair daughter."

So Earl Pelles lifted up his hands and swore as he would have him, and then he wept heavily and they bore him away from the gate weeping.

Now was there a great stir among all men to see the battle that was toward, and those without got upon their horses while those within stood upon the walls and looked down, and so they formed two great lines between which was left void a fair stretch of grass. Then Sir Mawrig armed himself at all points, and Sir Launcelot did on his helm and got upon his horse with a strong spear in his hand and so awaited the coming of the other. Then, presently, they made open the gate and Sir Mawrig rode forth on a full noble horse as black as night, and to every eye that looked upon him he seemed a right proper knight and one that bore himself full gallantly.

So those two knights came together and saluted each the other, as the custom was, and then they drew apart a good space and, turning, came together as it had been thunder. And, when they met, Sir Launcelot's spear broke upon the other's shield, but Sir Mawrig's spear held and overturned both Sir Launcelot and his horse, so that they grovelled heavily upon the earth. Now when Earl Pelles and those that were with him saw this they made great moan, for now, as it seemed to them, all was indeed lost; and well wist they that Sir Launcelot, now that he was unhorsed, would have scant mercy or chivalry at Sir Mawrig's hands. Now, in all knightly combats of those days, it was ever so that, when a knight was overborne or put from his horse, the knight that had the better of him would either hold his hand till such time as he had gotten his horse again or else, if the other so required,

he would light down from his horse and make an end with drawn swords. But, in this bandit knight, Sir Mawrig, was there neither chivalry nor knowledge of knightly bearing, so that, so soon as he might, he turned his horse with intent to ride overthwart the other as he lay upon the ground, and so pierce him with his spear. Howbeit in this he was in some measure at fault, for Sir Launcelot avoided his horse quicker than the other could turn, and as Sir Mawrig bore down upon him anew, he leaped lightly to his bridle hand and thrust the truncheon of his spear between the black horse's legs. Thereupon horse and rider rustled to the ground with a great noise and for a while Sir Mawrig lay at Sir Launcelot's feet, as one bemused, not knowing where he was. Then Earl Pelles and Eric cried loudly to Sir Launcelot to slay him as he lay there and make an end, for, as they said, he had dealt most foully and unknighly in that he had assailed him with his spear as he lay on the ground and therefore was he full worthy of death. But of this Sir Launcelot would have none, and so drew his sword and stood there till such time as Sir Mawrig might recover his senses. So, presently, that knight opened his eyes and then Sir Launcelot said to him :

"Get thee to thy feet, Sir Mawrig, and draw thy sword, for, albeit thou hast dealt full foully by me, yet will I take thee at no present disadvantage, but such as God may send me, by virtue of my sword."

So, when he had so said, he dressed his shield before him, and thereupon Sir Mawrig rose to his feet and rushed upon him with his sword as though resolved in his mind to make a quick end. And such a stroke he aimed as might have cleft a block of stone in twain, but Sir Launcelot avoided it lightly and smote Sir Mawrig hard upon the helm. So for a while they lashed at one another with their swords like men possessed, but ever was Sir Launcelot the lighter on his feet and the better breathed, so that many of Sir Mawrig's strokes fell wide and others Sir Launcelot caught upon his shield. And so, within a while, Sir Mawrig's breath began to come short and thick and his strokes fell ever slower and wider till, at the last, he could hardly keep his feet for weariness. Therewith, all on a sudden, Sir Launcelot leaped upon him as a wolf leaps upon a lamb and smote him full upon the helm so hard that the sword fell from Sir Mawrig's hand and he sank down limply upon his knees and then, while he yet knelt there, all bemused, Sir Launcelot smote him yet again so that his sword

cleft the helm into the brain-pan and Sir Mawrig fell dead at his feet.

Now, when those that looked down from the walls saw that Sir Mawrig was dead, they were in great dread for their own lives and so they left the wall and ran with all the speed they might to the north gate and fled thence into the wilderness as fast as their legs might carry them; only the seneschal fled not, for he was an old man who had dwelt there from boyhood, and wit you well that the castle was dearer to him than life. So, anon, while Earl Pelles and Haviland and Eric stood round Sir Launcelot in wonder and great joy and searching in their minds for words wherewith to praise him, this old seneschal came forth alone from the south gate bearing the keys of the castle on a velvet cushion and, with these, he knelt upon his knees full humbly before the gate and so waited. Then, when Sir Launcelot saw him so kneeling, he made to run towards him and take the keys from him, but Haviland held him by the arm and would not suffer him.

"My lord," said he, "by my good will you shall not deal with this fellow in this wise, for, wit you well, it were shame to us all and unknighly that you should make entrance to this castle upon your feet like some wandering friar. Therefore, my lord, by mine advice, shall you get again your good horse and, with your spearmen behind you, ride into the castle as befits a knight victorious."

"Well," said Sir Launcelot, "like as you have counselled me, even so will I do, but wit you well that my own horse will I have none of because that he failed me in the battle."

"Sir," said Haviland, "he was but grass fed and the other strong with corn."

"As for that I care not," said he, "but I have great will to essay the black horse that was Sir Mawrig's, for, wit you well, it is a full noble beast and better conditioned than my own. Therefore now, I pray you, lead it hither that I may make trial of it."

So the black horse was brought to him and, when he was in the saddle, it leaped and curveted hither and thither as though well pleased of its burden. So his forty spearmen were marshalled in order behind him, and, when that was done, he rode to where the seneschal knelt and said: "Sir, I pray you deliver me the keys," and, therewith, he rode into the courtelage and lighted down from his horse.

Then bethought he of the damsel that was there held captive, so he turned him to the seneschal and said :

" Sir Seneschal, you hold here in this castle, by force, the daughter of Earl Pelles, whom Sir Mawrig most traitorously seized against her will, and, for this foul deed, he now lieth dead upon the grass without the walls, as an ensample to all traitor knights and bandits. Now, therefore, lead me, I pray you, to where this damsel lieth, that she may forthwith be loosed of her bonds and delivered whole to her father."

So the seneschal got him the keys, and then, with these in his hand, led Sir Launcelot up a stone stairway to where a chamber stood high in the tower, and, when he was there come, he fitted a key to the doorway and threw it wide. Then Sir Launcelot entered into the chamber and looked around him and, within a while, he was aware of a young damsel that sat within the window, upon a stone seat that jutted forth from the wall.

Now, when she saw a knight all armed come within her chamber, the damsel thought that it had been Sir Mawrig, and she looked upon him with great dread in her eyes, for Sir Launcelot's helm was on his head. So, when he saw her misease, for greater courtesy he did off his helm and laid it on the table ; whereupon, wit you well, that she looked upon him with great wonder, for of all that had befallen without the walls she had heard nor seen nothing.

" Sir," said she, " I pray you who be you ? "

" Fair lady," said he, " I am a knight adventurous who, by the grace of God, hath, within this last hour, slain that false knight that held you here in bondage and, wit you well, madam, that even now your noble father abides your coming without the gate."

Now, when she heard this, the lady Elaine came forth out of that window and fell on her knees before Sir Launcelot, and there she wept as though her heart would burst, so that Sir Launcelot had great pity of her and lifted her to her feet as tenderly as he might ; and then he looked upon her and saw that she was passing fair beyond any lady that ever he saw, so that great love went out from him to her ward and he wist not what to do. Then, when she had dried her tears, the lady Elaine looked upon him and wit you well that so goodly a youth had she never aforetime seen, even in her dreams ; but quickly she abashed her eyes and made no sign, for she was a well-taught damsel and of good pride.

So they stood for a while in silence, and then, suddenly, there came upon Sir Launcelot a madness that ran like fire through his veins, and he bethought him how that Earl Pelles had promised him with a vow that, so he overcame Sir Mawrig, the Castle of Case and all that was therein should be his. So he turned him to the seneschal, where he stood without the doorway, and said :

" Sir, upon pain of your head, get you to the gates forthwith and see that they be closed and barred."

Wherewith the seneschal departed and went his ways and those two stood there alone. Then, presently, the lady Elaine said :

" Sir, why deal you in this wise ? "

" That which I do," said he, " I do but by the goodwill of your father, for, before this battle, he made promise to me upon his knighthood that, so I prevailed, this castle should be mine and all that it contains."

" Well, sir," she said, " if that be so, my father will hold to his word, for this castle I am sure he will not deny you. Therefore, so you will but deliver me to my father, then may you abide here and put this castle to such uses as may seem good to you, for such, as it seems, was his promise."

" Madam," said he, " wit you well that you are now within this castle ; therefore, by his covenant, as it would seem, must you abide here with me so long as I will."

Now, when she heard these words, the lady Elaine could hardly believe her ears for wonder, and so for a while she stood still and said nothing, and then, when she clearly understood that which he would have her know, her anger was so great within her that she could find no words wherewith to speak. But, at the last, her voice returned to her and she said :

" Sir Knight, me beseemeth there is here most shameful dealing and unknightly, and that my father made any such base covenant I may not readily believe, for ever are his thoughts noble and lofty. Therefore, sir, I require you of your knighthood, and as you are a gentleman, that you deliver me forthwith to my father."

" Madam," said he, " that may not be, for, inasmuch as I have won you in plain battle, and bruises and wounds without stint have I gotten for your sake, I were but a fool to put you from me now for, wit you well, madam, that I have great love unto you."

" Now I see and understand plainly," said she, " that ye

be no true knight, but even such another base knave as was Sir Mawrig, and therefore, trust thou well, Sir Knight, that of my goodwill shalt thou have no love of me but only hate and disdain."

"Madam," said he, "these be hard words, for wit you well that all that I do is by the consent of Earl Pelles."

"That will I hardly believe," she said, "but I hear it from my father's own mouth."

"As for that," said he, "it is not to be denied that such and such a covenant he made with me, for, as it seemeth to me, he had at that time but small hope that I would prevail."

"Then, sir," said she, "it were ungentle in you and discourteous to hold me to such a promise, seeing that I had no part therein."

Now, at these words, it is not to be denied that Sir Launcelot was sore ashamed, howbeit, as the book saith, the madness that had seized upon him was still in his blood, for, as it seemed to him, here was an adventure such as a man may not twice meet with betwixt birth and death, and, wit you well, he was full young. So he put aside all the better thoughts that warred within him against that which he did, and to the lady Elaine he said :

"Madam, so your father go back upon his promise, then doth he stand forsworn to the end of time, for such may no man do but he be shamed for ever."

"And any knight that holdeth a maiden against her will is shamed for ever," said she ; "and were there but one of the Round Table knights here, trust thou well that he would hang thee upon the nearest tree for this thy foul dealing."

Now, when she had so said, Sir Launcelot's heart smote him sore, for it is not to be denied that no words could she have used that could wound him in like fashion as did those, and so, for very shame, he stood in silence before her ; but, anon, he looked upon her face anew and then so great was his love for her that, beyond that, he could see nothing plainly, and so he said :

"Lady Elaine, did I love you less, then would I send you forth right readily to your father, but now, seeing how great is my love unto you, that may not be, and therefore, as it would seem, is there no remedy but that you must abide here within these walls."

"In this," said she, "I hold you to be baser than Sir Mawrig,

for of him had I no villainy ; but now, as it would seem, you would drive me whither I would not and that maugre my head."

"Now, by my faith ! " he cried, " you do me great wrong, lady Elaine ; for no such ungentle knight am I as to push my advantage to that length ; and, therefore, I would have you to know that, so you will give me your promise to speak no word with any of those that are without, then are you free to go whither you will within these castle walls."

At this she made mock courtesy to him down to the ground.

"Gramercy, sir, of your great goodness," said she ; but, for all her disdain, as he would have had her, so she promised, and with that he left her.

Now when Earl Pelles saw that the gates of the castle had been closed against him, wit you well that he was an angry man, and so he made them carry him in his litter till he was close beneath the walls and there he cried out continually :

"Why are the gates of my castle thus closed against me and where is my daughter, the lady Elaine, and that traitor knight to whom the keys were delivered ? "

So, when he was come down from the tower, Sir Launcelot crossed the courtelage and came to the top of the wall, and from there he looked down upon Earl Pelles and said :

"Sir, why make ye all this great noise ? for all that has been done is according to your own promise, for did you not say to me plainly and in few words that, so I slew Sir Mawrig, this Castle of Case and all that it held should be mine. Now, therefore, cease making this great noise, for you can by no means depart from this promise that you have made but you will be forsworn and shamed before all men."

Now, when Earl Pelles heard these words, he wist not what to say, for full well he knew that he had so said, not deeming that it would so fall out as it had, and now was he wood-wrath to be holden in this wise to a promise that he had lightly made.

Therefore, so soon as he might speak, he cried out :

"Ah ! villain knight and most ungentle that ye be, thus to hold me to words that I spoke in haste, and without duly weighing that which I said, for now know I of a surety that thou art no true knight but even such another bandit as Sir Mawrig. Therefore, wit thou well, Sir Launcelot, and trust it that I will lay siege to this castle till I subdue it, even

though I lie without the walls for a year, and, when at the last I have thee at a disadvantage, then will I hang thee from the walls even as I would hang any felon thief or robber, for such thou surely art."

"Well," said Sir Launcelot, "say what ye will and do as ye list, but, wit you well, Sir Earl, that for all your hot words I hold you to your promise, and from that you may not depart but you will be shamed for ever more."

With that he turned away and left him and, anon, he unarmed him and put salves upon his wounds, for of these he had gotten no few in the battle. Then, within a while, as he sat upon the battlements looking out toward the sea, the seneschal came to him with word that he had prepared them dinner in the great hall; whereat Sir Launcelot was right glad. So he bade the seneschal entreat the lady Elaine of her company at dinner and so passed into the hall. Thus, within a while, she came to him there, full disdainfully, and with never a glance to right or left, and so sat her down in silence. But, for all her scornful mien, wit you well that she had tired her head with all the care she might, for she had woven her hair into two long ropes of gold that fell down upon her shoulders on either side, and, to Sir Launcelot, as he looked upon her, she seemed fairer than any earthly being that God had made.

Thus then she sat upon his right hand, but never a word would she speak but it were "Yea, sir" or "Nay, sir"; and all that he might say to win her from her silence he said, but, to his soft words, she paid no manner of heed, nor did she so much as once turn her eyes upon him. So, when they had eaten and drunk, she rose to her feet and said: "Sir, have I your leave to withdraw me?"

"Alas, fair lady Elaine," said he, "God knows I would have you do as ye list, either to go or to stay as seemeth best to you; but wit you well that I shall be right heavy of your parting."

Now, when she had so departed, Sir Launcelot's heart smote him sore, because of the durance in which he held this maiden; for it is not to be denied that, in those days, no greater offence was there with which a knight of worship and honour might be accused than that he should hold a maiden against her will, and of this there was none that had better knowledge than Sir Launcelot. So, when he thought thereon, he was very greatly ashamed and, for all the great love that

he had unto the lady Elaine, he resolved that, on the morn, so soon as it was light, he would send her forth to her father, and so, presently, he withdrew him to the chamber that had been prepared for him and there slept as one that is very weary.

CHAPTER III

How Castle Case became the Castle of Joyous Garde

ON the morning next following, Sir Launcelot rose early from his bed and went forth and stood upon the walls, breathing in the air from the sea, for, in truth, the day was as fair as any that God had yet made, and there, as he stood, he saw on all sides the tents of Earl Pelles' men shining white in the sun, and there, too, reared against the western gate, was the Earl's own blue pavilion. So, when he saw all these things, then it repented him sore of his May madness of yesterday that had caused him so to do as to close the gates of his own castle against Earl Pelles; for, though full well he knew that, if he were to go forth with his men, he could make a short end of that siege, yet was he full loth so to do, for against Earl Pelles had he no illwill to do him a mischief, but rather the contrary. So within himself he said once more: "This day will I send her forth to her father, and so make an end of this foolish strife."

Thus, even as he so said, he espied the lady Elaine as she came lightly across the courtelage, with the sun shining upon her head as upon burnished gold, and, the better to see her without being seen, Sir Launcelot hid himself behind a tower, and so she came right up on to the wall and there stood gazing forth upon the tents that were marshalled without. So, as she stood, she sang softly to herself and in her eyes was the light of a great joy, the fullness whereof cannot be told in words, at which Sir Launcelot marvelled very greatly.

Then, on a sudden, he felt great shame within him that he should be thus watching her unawares, and so he came forth and stood beside her, whereat she went as red as poppies in a cornfield, but of words she spake none.

Then, as Sir Launcelot saw her standing there, so fair to the eye as she was, he repented him of his resolve that he would send her forth to her father. "For," thought he, "to-morn will I send her forth but to-day will I hold her here for the joy of her fellowship." So then he said to her:

"Fair lady Elaine, I pray you of your gentleness that you hold you not from me so stiffly, for thus am I sorely put to the rebuke, the which doth me great pain."

"Sir," said she, "wit you well that a prisoner hath no great heart for speech with her jailer."

"Alas!" said he, "would that I were your knight and not your jailer."

"Well," said she, "you ride the long road to that end."

"Show me the short road," he said, "and I will spur along it faster than ever man yet rode."

"That short road," said she, "thou mayest learn of thyself but not of others."

Thereat he stood still and held silence, for he had no understanding of her words, and, as he so stood, she turned without a word and left him where he stood, and so passed within the castle and up the stone stairway. Then, at seeing her thus depart, as the sun departs at the close of day, Sir Launcelot gave a great sigh, so that his heart well-nigh burst with sorrow, and then he ran after her blindly, as one who knows not what he does. Thus he came up with her upon the stairway, and she, perceiving him, turned her round and stamped her foot full hotly upon the ground.

"How is this?" she cried; "am I not free to come and go within the castle walls but you must ever be upon my heels? Was this a part of our covenant?"

At which he stood still very greatly discomfited and said:

"Madam, I pray you hold me excused, for, wit you well, I meant no discourtesy"; and so, for shame, he would have turned and gone back the way he had come; but she, seeing this, ran down to him and took him by the hand and said:

"Fair sir, I pray you pardon me of all my illwill to you ward, for now I perceive plainly that you be a gentle knight and a courteous, and therefore am I no longer adread of you, so it pleaseth you to be in my company."

Thereat, wit you well that Sir Launcelot was very greatly rejoiced and he said to her:

"Lady Elaine, God knows that it rejoiceth me beyond measure to be in your company, but so have you, full many a time, shamed me by your words that I feel I may no longer hold you here against your will. Therefore, lady Elaine, I pray you come with me right now to the gateway and, or the sun hath climbed another shaftmon in the heavens, you shall go forth free to your father."

"Fie, sir!" said she; "would you thrust me forth from the gate as though I were a sheep?"

"But is it not your wish," said he, "to go forth free?"

"Surely," said she, "it is my very wish, but I would go forth as befits an earl's daughter, with a blast of trumpets and with my father well prepared, with all his men around him, to receive me."

"Well," said he, "I will send forth such a message to him forthwith, that he may be so prepared."

"I thank you, sir," she said, "and, as you have said, so would I have you do; but first I would pray of you a boon, which is this: that you come to where this stairway ends and lift up for me the hatch that closes the way to the open roof above, for full well wot I, by trial of old, that it is overmuch for my strength, and yet have I great will to go upon the roof."

So then was Sir Launcelot glad and he did as she would have him do, and then went they both forth upon the roof and looked about them to the sea upon the one hand, and to the mountains upon the other hand; and there she showed him Bamborough and Lowick, but Alnwick and Berwick they might not see because that they were veiled in blue mist.

"Sir," said she, "would you that I showed to you all the eftures and byways of this castle?"

"I will well," said he; "but how comes it that you have knowledge of these things, that have been but twenty-four hours within these walls?"

"Sir," said she, "wit you well that many good days have I dwelt in this fair castle, for hither came we straight from York five years past, I being but eleven years of age at the time, and here we dwelt continually till the day came when we went to Corbin Castle for fear of Mawrig."

So then she led him hither and thither about the castle, showing him all that there was to be seen, and it was a full noble castle and a large, and, in the end, when she had all shown, she led him through the great hall to the battlements that gave upon the sea, and there the water from the well within the castle ran down over the wall in a clear stream. So, as they leaned over together and watched it, it so fell out that the wind blew one of the ropes of her hair across his face, whereupon a sudden madness seized upon him and he caught her to him and kissed her many times, so that she might not speak or move.

Then, at the last, when he had loosed her in some disorder, she smiled upon him and said :

" Sir, I perceive that you have at length found the short road."

So, wit you well, thereafter these two were well content, so that Sir Launcelot clean forgot to send the message that he had framed to Earl Pelles ; but when he told the lady Elaine of this, she did but laugh and said :

" Well, now must my father win me by the siege, for there is no other remedy."

" And with that you are content ? " said he.

" Truly," said she, " I am well content."

Then, because of the great joy that they had, each of other, that Castle of Case became to them a place of wonder and delight ; so, on a day, he said to the lady Elaine :

" My fair and sweet lady, seeing that these walls guard you continually from your father and that therein we have great joy, mebesee meth that it were good that we gave to this castle some name that accords better with our present state." And, when she laughed and was quickly consenting thereto, he said : " Now, by the faith of my body, we will name it ' Joyous Garde,' for thus will it be named half in my country's tongue and half in thine, and so will we be both partakers of the name and in equal parts."

So she was quickly consenting, and thus it was then named, and by that name, as the book saith, it was known of all men from that time on.

CHAPTER IV

How Sir Launcelot Wed the Daughter of Earl Pelles

NOW, all this while, Earl Pelles lay without the walls of the Castle of Case continually raging against Sir Launcelot, nor knew he anything of the joy that those two within the walls had each of other, nor of how, because of this joy and because that his daughter was kept from him by the strength of the castle walls, they had renamed the castle "Joyous Garde." So, greatly dreading a long siege because of his infirmity, and not knowing that there was but sufficient victual within the castle for a bare week, he cast about in his mind how he might the more quickly bring to subjection this young knight who had seized upon his castle and his daughter. So he took counsel with Eric how he had best deal in the matter, and Eric said in plain words that, by his advice, Earl Pellas should send word to Sir Gaston of Berwick that, if he would do battle with this young bandit and put him to the rebuke, then should the castle and all the lands pertaining thereto be his for ever.

"And I doubt not," said Eric, "but that Sir Gaston will be able enough for this young springald, for he is named a passing good knight of his hands and a well-breathed, and, wit you well, sir, that Sir Mawrig was greatly bemused with wine when those two did battle together, else had this Sir Launcelot never prevailed against him; but with Sir Gaston it will be far otherwise, for he is a careful knight and well-taught withal, whether on foot or on horse."

So Earl Pelles sent for Sir Gaston and he came right readily, for, in all that country round, there was no castle so fair and strong as was the Castle of Joyous Garde, and broad lands were there around it that paid truage to it, and, if all these things were to be his for the giving and taking of a few buffets with a stripling knight scarce yet come to manhood, then was Sir Gaston not one to hold him aloof.

Thus it came about that, on a day, about the hour of noon, as Sir Launcelot and the lady Elaine looked over the walls, they were aware of a great stir and noise of men and horses,

and there, over against Earl Pelles' pavilion, was a big knight all armed, and twoscore spearmen with him. So, while they wondered greatly who he might be, presently this knight espied them as they looked down from the walls, whereupon he spurred his horse to them and, when he was come near under the walls, he cried out on high :

"Where is this false knight who hath traitorously seized upon this castle and who now holdeth the lady Elaine by force from her father, the noble Earl Pelles? Let him come forth, an he dare, and do battle with me, Sir Gaston of Berwick, or else be held up to all men as a recreant."

Now, when Sir Launcelot heard these words, he was but ill pleased and he cried back :

"Sir Gaston de Berwick, I would have you to understand that I am neither traitor nor recreant, for all that I have done has been according to the covenant that Earl Pelles made with me when first I came within these marches, and that he cannot now deny unless he be forsworn. And that I have the right in this matter I will even now prove upon your body, God willing, so soon as I be armed."

Therewith he put on his armour, with all the speed he might, and then he got upon Sir Mawrig's black horse, and, with a good spear in his hand, he rode forth from the western gate with Haviland behind him.

Now, Sir Launcelot's anger was still hot within him because that Sir Gaston had named him traitor and recreant before all the people that were there ; so, when he was come without the walls, he cried out as loud as he might :

"Now, Sir Gaston, keep you from me as best you may, for I dare say that, with me, you shall have your hands as full as ever fell to your lot since first you wore a helm."

"Of that shall we now make short trial," said Sir Gaston ; "therefore avaunt ye no more, but make you ready."

So, with all the host gathered together both within and without the castle, those two knights departed, the one here and the other there, and then they came together as hard as they might drive, and, at their meeting, Sir Launcelot put Sir Gaston clean from his saddle over his horse's croup. Then Sir Gaston was wood-wrath indeed, and he leaped to his feet and drew his sword.

"Sir," said he, "my spear hath failed me but so shall not my sword ; therefore keep thee from me, for, all that I may, shall I now mischief thee."

So then Sir Launcelot lighted down from his horse and drew his sword, and then those two lashed at one another for a while, tracing and traversing as best they might ; but ever Sir Launcelot had the advantage, for he was quicker on his feet and better breathed, and such buffets he dealt Sir Gaston about the head and shoulders as no man of those that looked upon them had ever seen strake by mortal man.

So, to make a short conclusion, Sir Gaston was quickly beaten to his knees and then fell upon his back, and there lay wearily, with Sir Launcelot's foot upon his breast.

" Now, Sir Gaston," said he, " I require you that you say quickly that I am neither recreant nor traitor, or else are you but a dead man."

So thereupon Sir Gaston said the loth word, for he had no mind to die at that time, and then Sir Launcelot said to him :

" Sir, as you would have your life, I require you now to make oath before me, by the faith you owe to God, that, from this day on, you will return to your allegiance to Earl Pelles and pay him truage as you did aforehand."

" I swear it," said Sir Gaston, " by the faith I owe to God."

" Then," said Sir Launcelot, " we two may lightly accord, for I dare say that there is not that between us which may not, with little pain, be righted."

So, with that, Sir Gaston rose to his feet, and then those two went to the pavilion of Earl Pelles, and, when they had passed through the port thereof, they found him seated within, and very sorely I ween was he cast down in countenance, for now, as it seemed to him, were his daughter and his castle both reft from him for ever.

" My lord," said Sir Gaston, " all that I might do I did against this young knight, but it availed me little, for wit you well that I had liefer encounter any two knights that ever I met than this one, for trust thou well that his strokes are not to be withstood."

With that he unlaced his umberere and ungirded his sword, and in like wise did Sir Launcelot, and then they looked each on other and between them there arose great liking, for Sir Gaston was a full noble knight and well-mannered withal. But, for all the fair words that Sir Gaston spake, Earl Pelles ever held silence, for, in his heart, he had great despite unto Sir Launcelot because of the manner of his dealing in the matter of Castle Case and the lady Elaine.

So, in the end, seeing that by no means would Earl Pelles look upon him but with malice, Sir Launcelot said :

"Sir, it marvelleth me greatly why you should thus continually withsay me who would, before all else, wed your fair daughter, the lady Elaine ; for I dare say that I am come of as good lineage as any in this realm that might come hither seeking her in marriage, and, wit you well, Earl Pelles, that to me ward she hath some love."

"Sir," said the Earl, "I wist not in truth that you would wed her, for ever, in your speech with me, have you spoken openly against marriage, inasmuch as a wife encumbreth a knight from the quest of deeds adventurous."

"Well," said Sir Launcelot, "I will not deny but that I spake such words, and so did I in all good faith intend ; but now am I persuaded that I so spake in haste and without due knowledge, for no greater wish have I in my heart than to wed your fair daughter and so be her true knight unto death."

"Fair sir," said Earl Pelles, "now I understand and see plainly that you be a true knight and no base destroyer of damsels, and therefore, so you would wed my daughter, I will say no more to the contrary. But first I must know of what lineage you be come, for never, or the time when you first came within these marches, did I hear any speak of one bearing your name."

"That I will now tell you," said he. "I am the son of King Ban of Guienne, which is a country far to the south, across the seas, and there have I wide lands. But so it came about that, in the wars which my father had with King Claudas of Languedoc, he was so sore pushed, that for his better safety he besought help of King Arthur. And so King Arthur came, and, in great measure because of his might and his great skill in war, King Claudas was put to the worse. There, then, in the midst of these wars, King Arthur knighted me on the field of battle, I being but a child at the time, and there, on the field of battle, I swore fealty to him till death. So, when, as it fell out later, King Arthur had scant joy of his Round Table knights, he sent for me, if so be I might help him by good example to bring them to better ways. Thus came I to Camelot, but, when I had been there but a bare month, I rode forth on quest adventurous, and so, Earl Pelles, came I, by great good fortune, to your Castle of Corbin."

Now, when he had made an end of speaking, Earl Pelles held silence for a long while and then, in the end, said :

" Sir Launcelot, of your good lineage am I now assured, but meseemeth, sir, that, by your own telling, you failed in some part of that which the King would have of you ; for when he would have had you rebuke his unruly knights by your example, then, so soon as you were come, you rode away."

At these words Sir Launcelot abashed his head and made no answer, for full well wist he why he had so ridden away, but no word of that might he speak to those two knights. So he said :

" Sirs, in that was I to blame ; but for worship and renown I had great will, and so I rode forth seeking these things."

So they spake thereof no more, and then did Earl Pelles make to Sir Launcelot a free gift of the Castle of Joyous Garde to hold and to dwell therein for evermore, so long as he might live ; and he sent a swift pricker to the Abbot of Lowick, praying him that he would come to Joyous Garde so soon as he might upon the morn and wed those two in the chapel that was within the castle. And so it was done, and, on the day next following, about the hour of noon, came the abbot from Lowick, and thither too came Sir Boland of Bamborough and Sir Carnwald of Alnwick, and there were those two, Sir Launcelot and the lady Elaine, wed by the good abbot, and of feasting and dancing and minstrelsy, wit you well, there was no end.

PART II

CHAPTER I

How Sir Gawaine Rode to Joyous Garde upon an Errand

NOW pass we lightly by the five years which next followed, and so come we again to the Castle of Joyous Garde, where dwelt Sir Launcelot and the lady Elaine in great love and amity, and, with them, was their son Galahad, he being at the time but four years of age.

Thus, on a day, as Sir Launcelot and his lady sat within the castle, there came riding to the gateway a big knight on a very weary horse. Tall and broad of shoulder was this knight, and, as he rode with his helm upon his arm, it was plainly to be seen that he had red hair and blue eyes that looked forth fiercely from beneath thick brows. So, when this knight came to the south gate of the castle, he beat lustily upon it with the butt of his spear, and, anon, here looked forth the porter.

"Sir," said he, "what would you?"

"Good fellow," said the knight, "bear you word to the noble knight, Sir Launcelot, that Sir Gawaine, the king's nephew, is without and would have speech with him."

So the porter departed, and, presently, came Sir Launcelot to the gateway, and, when he saw Sir Gawaine, he was filled with a great joy and so he cried out:

"Well be ye come within these marches, my lord Gawaine, for now can you give me short tidings of your noble uncle, King Arthur."

So he made open the gate, and therewith Sir Gawaine rode in and, wit you well, those two had great joy each of other. Then, when they had much spoken together, Sir Launcelot led in Sir Gawaine to where the lady Elaine sat stitching at her tambour, with her son Galahad beside her, and, when he had looked upon her, Sir Gawaine said:

"Madam, now I understand and see plainly why my lord, Sir Launcelot, hath, for so long time, held himself from the

Court at Camelot ; for, wit you well, lady Elaine, that at Camelot we have none that be so fair as you, if it be not the lady Gueneviere."

"Sir," said she, "so as I please my lord, Sir Launcelot, then am I well content."

Then Sir Gawaine looked upon the boy Galahad, where he stood before him soberly and straightly, and he saw that he had a face like unto the angels of God and eyes that shone like stars.

"*Pardie!*" said he, "but that is as noble a boy as ever I yet looked upon."

At these words, trust thou well that the lady Elaine was well pleased ; but, none the less, her heart was heavy within her, for why, thought she, had Sir Gawaine come riding these many weary days to Joyous Garde if it were not, by some means, to bring sorrow upon their lives ? Howbeit, of her fears she gave no sign, for, as at that time, she had to make ready for their guest and to purvey for him a dinner worthy of a weary knight. So she left them there, seated within the hall, for to busy herself with that which should be done, and so, within a while, they sat them all down at dinner, and, wit you well, the lady Elaine's face was smiling and bright and no shadow was there upon it, but, deep within her heart, she had great dread.

So, when they had all well eaten and drunk, and Sir Gawaine was well refreshed with wine, the lady Elaine smiled upon him and said :

"Fair sir, I prithee tell me do you ride hither at the bidding of the King ?"

"Of a truth I do," said he, "else had I not sat in my saddle these many weary days."

"Then," said she, "hide from us no longer, I pray you, the message that you bear."

Now, when he was bidden so to do, Sir Gawaine was not a little troubled in mind, for full well wist he that, when he had said that which he had to say, the lady Elaine would smile no more. So he said :

"Madam, by mine advice, you will forbear till the morn, and then, while the sun shines brightly upon us, will I discharge me of my message."

But of this she would have none, for, as she said, things feared were ever worse than things known.

So, when Sir Gawaine saw that there was no remedy but

that he must tell all his errands, he turned him about and said :

“ My lord, Sir Launcelot, full well you wot how that, when first King Arthur received the Round Table from Leodogrance of Cameliard, as the marriage portion of the lady Gueneviere, he was sore put to it to fill all the hundred and forty seats that it contained, for the greater part of his strength had been shorn from him in the long wars with the Anglo-Saxons. And so, many were appointed to the fellowship that were not worthy, and, with these and with those that King Leodogrance had sent, he had, in the end, one hundred and twenty-eight knights, so that twelve seats there were that were yet void. So then, of these hundred and twenty-eight knights, some fell away from their vows and some waxed unruly and some died of sickness, so that, within a while, there remained of good and noble knights but a remnant, to the great jeopardy of the realm. Then it was that King Arthur remembered the vow that you had made to him when he fought for your father against King Claudas of Languedoc, that never would you fail him in his need, but come quickly across the seas at his bidding and serve him truly and faithfully next after God.

“ So King Arthur sent word unto you, Sir Launcelot, and lightly you came across the seas as he required of you, and so, within a while, you came to his palace at Camelot, and there, Sir Launcelot, you abode but a bare month and then rode away on quest adventurous, for what cause God and you alone know ; and now have full five years passed since that day, but to Camelot have you returned no more. Therefore hath King Arthur sent me to require you, by your knighthood and by the vow of Pentecost, that you make no longer tarrying in this far country of Sarras but come to him to Camelot as fast as you may to aid him, by all the means that may be, in the government of this unruly realm. So that, my lord, Sir Launcelot, is the message that I bear.”

Then, when he had made an end, they all held silence for a long while, and, wit you well, the face of the lady Elaine was dimmed with the tears that fell from her eyes. But in the end Sir Launcelot answered him :

“ Sir, all that the king requireth of me that will I do, for my vow is to him, and of that vow will I never stint me so long as the breath is in my body.”

At that, the lady Elaine arose hastily from her seat, and with no word to any, went quickly from the hall, for, wit you

well, the tears were raining down her face so that she might not speak. So, within a while, they all went to their beds.

Then, on the day next following, Sir Launcelot and Sir Gawaine walked forth together into the forest and there they sat them down upon the bole of a great sycamore tree that had fallen, and there Sir Gawaine began to speak of many things, and, in especial, of the endless hatred of the house of Gorlois for King Arthur, and of the great wars that had been against the Anglo-Saxons ten years before. So, as he spoke, Sir Launcelot bent an ever-ready ear to his words, for, at the time of the wars, he had been but a small child in the Kingdom of Guienne, and knew of these things but by chance hearsay. Thus, when Sir Gawaine spoke of Queen Morgawse, his mother, and of Morgan le Fay, her sister, and of the hatred that they bore unto King Arthur, Sir Launcelot said :

" My fair lord, it marvelleth me greatly how that you, who are grandson to Gorlois, have no part in this hatred that your kith and kin have against King Arthur but, in all the wars that have been, have ever been upon his side."

" As for that," said Sir Gawaine, " there is scant cause for wonder, for wit you well that King Arthur made me knight even as he made thee knight, and, at that time, I swore fealty to him for ever, and from that vow will I in no wise depart, for therein would be shame to myself and treason to the noblest king in all the world. And, as for the death of Gorlois, that is a matter that is far away, before that King Arthur was born and before that I was born, for, as well you wot, I am within a year of my uncle's years, and to me it ever seemeth folly to bear enmity against the son because of the guilt of the father, as do my mother Queen Morgawse and her sister Morgan le Fay."

" Therein ye speak soothly," said Sir Launcelot, " and yet, my lord, Sir Gawaine, rumour hath it that, for the sons of Pellinore, you and your brothers have but scant love."

" And therein rumour lies not," said Sir Gawaine, and, as he spoke, his eyes shone fiercely as those of a wild beast ; " for Pellinore yet lives and my father's blood is unavenged ; therefore shall I never rest nor know peace till I have slain him."

" Meseemeth that were great pity," said Sir Launcelot, " for how can the kingdom stand if those of the Round Table fellowship deal thus bloodily one with other ? "

" Well, sir," said Sir Gawaine, " have patience and I will

tell you as well as I may of the whole matter, how these things befell. It was in this wise. When King Arthur was first crowned king at Caerleon upon Usk he was but eighteen years of age, and, for that cause, he sat but perilously upon his throne for, because that Uther Pendragon had murdered Gorlois, he had enemies and to spare on every side—King Mark in Cornwall, Uriens and Morgan le Fay in Gore, and my father Lot and my mother in Lothorn, and, besides all these, north of Trent, there ever lay the great strength of the Anglo-Saxons.

“Now, as all men know full well, and you best of all, my lord, Sir Launcelot, King Arthur had dwelt all his days, till the day he was crowned King, across the seas, now with King Hoël of Bretagne and now with your father King Ban; and, of these two, seeing the weakness of King Arthur, Merlin straightway sought succour, requiring them, by the love they once bore unto King Arthur, to bring their armies across the seas to help establish him upon his throne. Thus, within a while, came King Hoël to Totnes with a great army, and, when Merlin had seen him set sail from Bretagne, he journeyed on to Guienne and there besought your father to do likewise.

“Now, wit you well that, when he was crowned at Caerleon upon Usk, King Arthur was full young and hot of his blood, so that, when King Hoël and his army were come to him, he deemed that he was then strong enough for all his foes, and so set his face northward and marched till he came to Bedegraine in Sherwood Forest, but farther than this he might not go, for there against him was arrayed Colgrin and a great host of Anglo-Saxons.

“So there was fought a great battle, which raged from prime till the fall of night, with no great advantage to either side, for many fell of King Arthur’s army and of the Anglo-Saxons, as it was said, a like number; but, when the day next following broke, Colgrin and his host were there no more, for they had fled to York, and there they shut themselves within the walls.

“So, at Bedegraine, King Arthur and King Hoël rested many days, and thither came to them King Leodogrance and his daughter, the lady Gueneviere, but, at that time, the king cast no great love unto her, and so they went back whence they had come, to the kingdom of Cameliard.

“Then, when they were in some part recovered, those two kings marched to the city of York and there laid siege to

Colgrin, but, in that, they misjudged in some part their strength, for Colgrin came forth and drove them from the walls and so along Humber, toward the sea, so that they were like to be altogether destroyed. But then, when they were sore beset on all sides, so that all hope seemed past, by the great grace of God there came sailing into Humber your father, King Ban, and with him twenty fair ships.

"So King Ban landed his army, which was a great host and well-armed, and then those three kings together drove Colgrin back to York, and there, within a while, they took the city and put to the sword all that were therein.

"Now, my lord, Sir Launcelot, when the noise of these great deeds came to us in Lothorn, there was great joy among us all, for, wit you well, sir, that we of the Picts loved the Anglo-Saxons no better than did King Arthur. Howbeit, my mother Morgawse hated her brother King Arthur even more fiercely than she hated the Anglo-Saxons, and so, by her wiles and arts, she prevailed upon my father, Lot, that he should make common cause with the Anglo-Saxons against King Arthur and those other kings that were with him. Now, when first I heard speak of this treason I might not speak for shame, for, wit you well, Sir Launcelot, that King Arthur was mine uncle and half-brother to my mother Morgawse, so that to make common cause with the heathen against him seemed to me so shameful a thing that a man might not so do and yet keep his honour. Therefore spoke I privily with my brothers, Agravaine and Gaheris, touching this matter, and, when they were in accord with me, we three rode forth on a day from my father's castle and made no great tarrying till we came to the city of Carlisle. There we abode eight days till we had tidings that King Arthur's army was even now without the walls, and then we went into the market-place and there we three knelt upon our knees till King Arthur came riding in. Straightway, when he espied us, he cried out :

" ' Who be you who thus kneel here in the market-place ? ' "

" ' Sir,' said I, ' we be three sons of Lot, King of the Picts, for I am Gawaine and these be my brothers, Agravaine and Gaheris, and we be come hither to swear fealty to our uncle, the noble King Arthur.' "

" ' Jesu ! ' said he, ' ye be well come indeed, my three nephews,' and therewith he embraced us all very tenderly.

" ' And where are your brothers Mordred and Gareth ? ' he said.

“ ‘ Sir,’ said I, ‘ they are yet with our lady mother, for they were full young to ride with us, for, wit you well, mine uncle, that I am the oldest of them all and, as yet, but nineteen years of age.’

“ ‘ Then,’ said King Arthur, ‘ are you within a year of my own age, for all you are my nephew, for, as you wot full well, your mother was married or ever I was born.’

“ Then King Arthur made us all to kneel down once again in the market-place, and there he knighted us all, and we all swore fealty to him for evermore. But more than this we did not, neither did he, for at that time there was no fellowship of the Round Table.

“ So, within a while, King Arthur and King Hoël and King Ban departed from Carlisle and led their army through Strathclyde to the lake of a hundred isles, and there they encountered with my father, Lot, and with Childeric, for these two had there gathered together all the strength of the Picts and of the Anglo-Saxons. Six great battles they fought around the shores of that lake, and, in all of these, King Arthur and those with him put the Picts and the Anglo-Saxons to the worse and slew great numbers of them, so that, at the last, Childeric and his Anglo-Saxons fled away south ; but the Picts scattered among the hills and among the islands on the lake, for they thought thus to find better safety from the fury of King Arthur. In this, however, they were at some fault, for King Arthur sent men hither and thither to seek out such as were in hiding and to slay them as they found them. Thus then they did and, as it so fortunèd, King Pellinore found my father, Lot, on one of the islands of the lake and there he most foully slew him.”

“ Sir,” said Sir Launcelot, “ it hath ever been noised among men in these parts that it was Sir Balan who slew your father and not King Pellinore.”

“ As for that,” said Sir Gawaine, “ I know not which of the two it was, for they were together, but Sir Balan is now dead, and therefore, for to avenge my father, shall I slay King Pellinore when and how I may.”

“ Alas ! for this vow of thine,” said Sir Launcelot, “ for therein I see such sorrow and strife for the Round Table fellowship as may never be abated.”

“ Well,” said Sir Gawaine, “ I care not, for such is my resolve, and thereby will I hold as well as I may.”

At this Sir Launcelot gave a great sigh, for full well wist

he how great sorrow would come to them all from this vow, for very dear to King Arthur was King Pellinore, and so were all of his five sons, which were Sir Tor, Sir Lamorak, Sir Aglovale, Sir Dornar, and Sir Percival ; but very plainly Sir Launcelot saw that in further debate with Sir Gawaine there was no present profit. Therefore he turned to him and said :

" I prithee, my lord, Sir Gawaine, tell me of the ending of these wars, for nothing have I heard thereof but the loose babble of such as speak idly."

" Well," said Sir Gawaine, " to make a short conclusion, King Arthur pursued Childeric to Dunedin, and there King Arthur sat upon a stone upon the great hill that overlooks the city, while below was fought yet another battle in which, once again, Childeric was put to the worse and so turned and fled south with King Arthur hot upon his heels.

" So, within a while, they came to where three sister hills rise from the plain beside the great river, and, on the least of these three hills, which men call *Bowden*, Childeric took his stand. And there was fought the fiercest battle of all these long wars, and there were slain Childeric and all the flower of his army, so that, of the Anglo-Saxons, there were none left alive ; but some few there were that King Arthur spared, such as Earl Pelles, the father of thy fair lady, Sir Launcelot."

So, when he had made an end, Sir Launcelot thanked him, and then those two rose up from where they sat and returned to the Castle of Joyous Garde.

Then, on the morning next following, at the hour of prime, Sir Launcelot and Sir Gawaine rode forth from the south gate with their horses' heads set for Camelot, and, wit you well, that, among those that saw them go, there was very great heaviness. As for the lady Elaine, she wept so as though her heart would burst, and in like wise did Dame Brisen, but the boy Galahad wept not. Then, when Sir Gawaine saw her thus weeping, " Madam," said he, " why weep you so sorrowfully, for I dare say that Sir Launcelot will win such honour at the Court as no man hath known heretofore ? "

" Alas ! " said she, " it is ever honour for the man, but tears for the woman."

" Nay," said Sir Gawaine, " but honour for both ; for, in that which a man gaineth of honour, the woman hath ever part. What say you, Galahad ? " So with that he turned to the boy, and Galahad looked upon him steadfastly and said :

"Honour for the man, tears for the woman, and glory for the boy." At which they all wondered greatly, for he was but four years of age.

So, when Sir Launcelot had kissed his lady very tenderly he got his horse and those two knights rode forth together through the south gate. But Haviland went not with them, for Sir Launcelot had charged him that he should hold the Castle of Joyous Garde for him till such day as he came again ; and the lady Elaine and her son he sent back to Earl Pelles at the Castle of Corbin.

CHAPTER II

How Sir Launcelot and Sir Gawaine came to Camelot at the King's Bidding

THUS, within fifteen days of their departing, Sir Launcelot and Sir Gawaine came to the valley of Itchen, wherein stood the palace that Merlin had built for King Arthur at Camelot, very fair to the eyes and rich, and covered with a golden dome that reared its height glittering to the sky, so that, when the sun shone, men saw it as a flame of fire in the sky for many a league round. When these two knights, then, were so far come, they lighted down from their horses by the side of a well that was thereby, and there they washed them as best they might, for they had ridden long and wearily. So, then they were clean, they got again their horses and rode downward into the valley, and so, within a while, they came to the gate of the palace. Then these two knights avoided their horses and together they went on foot into the Great Round Hall, where sat the king and queen and all the fellowship of the Round Table, for it was the hour of dinner.

Great joy, I wot, had all that noble fellowship of the coming of those two knights; and, as for the King, so glad a man was he to see Sir Launcelot once more among them that he rose to his feet and cried out before them all:

"Well be ye now come, Sir Launcelot, to this our palace of Camelot, for it is not to be denied that of honour and worship our fair fellowship hath lost much because of your long tarrying in the North."

Now, when they heard these words, all that were there gathered together felt that Sir Launcelot had been put to the rebuke, and so in truth felt he, so that, for a while, he stood there in silence and wist not what to say; whereat the Queen, seeing that he stood still and was in some part abashed, stretched out her hand and said before them all:

"It were surely uncourteous in us all, now that Sir Launcelot be come among us once again, were we to blame him overmuch because that a fair lady hath held him from us for

so long time, for very sure am I that there is none in this Court but would have done in like wise for any lady whose knight he is, or else be for ever shamed of his knighthood. Therefore let us say no more of that which is past and done, but let us rather thank God that Sir Launcelot is here once again and make him the best cheer we may."

Therewith she held out to him both her hands and smiled very sweetly upon him, and thereupon Sir Launcelot went forward and knelt upon his knees before King Arthur and before Queen Gueneviere, and then he said :

"My liege lord, King Arthur, full well I wot that I have in some part failed of the purpose wherewith I first came to this realm of Logris, but that my time hath not been wholly misspent I may in good sooth make avaunt, for, wit you well, my lord, King Arthur, that I have brought into good subjection the whole kingdom of Northumbria, which aforetime had sadly fallen away, for now hath Sir Gaston of Berwick and Sir Boland of Bamborough and Sir Carnwald of Alnwick all become once again thy true liege people, which, wit you well, sir, were no light matter to achieve."

"My lord, Sir Launcelot," said King Arthur, "very sure am I that, in all things, you have borne yourself well and nobly, and for the taming of those unruly lords I am in great measure beholden to you. And now talk we no more of such matter, for, trust thou well, that we be all greatly rejoiced that ye be once more come among us. Therefore, Sir Launcelot, sit you down on the left hand of the lady Gueneviere and refresh you with all that we may set before you, for wit you well that ye be very welcome to this fellowship."

Then Sir Launcelot sat down next to the Queen, for that was the place appointed him, and therein sat he from that day on ; and they spoke together of many matters that had befallen since the time, five years past, when he had ridden away from Camelot on quest adventurous. So he told her of the Maimed Earl, as men called Earl Pelles, and of the lady Elaine and her son, and of his battles with Sir Mawrig and Sir Gaston.

"Sir," said she, when he had made an end, "there is one coming hither for the Easter tourney who, it may well be, is bigger than either of those two knights you name, for, as men say, he is the best knight with sword or spear that any hath seen within memory, and, so you can overcome him, you will win worship indeed."

"How is this knight named?" said he.

"He is Sir Tristram de Lyonesse and nephew to King Mark of Cornwall," said the Queen, "and for some time past hath he dwelt in the Kingdom of Bretagne, but now is he lately come to this realm of Logris and hath put to the worse so many good knights that men hold him to be the greatest knight in the world. And for this cause is the king at some misease, for great shame were it to all of us were this Sir Tristram to bear away the prize; and wit you well that, as at present, we have none among the Round Table knights who is the master of Sir Lamorak, and whether he be big enough to withstand this Cornishman God only knows, but King Arthur misdoubts him sorely."

CHAPTER III

How the Queen would have had Sir Launcelot to be her Knight

THEN they spoke together of many things, and in especial of Sir Balin and Sir Balan and of such other knights as had met their death since Sir Launcelot last went from the Court, and of others that had been appointed in their stead, and of the Queen's white knights, which were twelve in number. So, when they had spoken long while and of many things, suddenly the Queen turned to him and said :

"My lord, Sir Launcelot, I pray you that you be my knight at the Easter jousts forthcoming."

"Right gladly, madam," said he, "will I be your knight."

"And you will wear my token?" said she.

"My lady Gueneviere," he said, "of that I pray you hold me excused, for wit you well, madam, that no lady's token may I wear, or ever have worn, because of my lady Elaine."

At that, as the book saith, the Queen bit upon her lip ill pleased, but, within a while, she laughed lightly and so said :

"Well, then, Sir Launcelot, thou shalt be my knight and wear no token, if so be that this lady of thine holdeth thee thus fast."

And so she sat a while in silence, and then, on a sudden, she said :

"Tell me of this lady Elaine of thine. Is she in truth so passing fair—fairer than I?"

"Madam," said he, "whether she be fairer than you or less fair in truth I know not; for thus might one say and another might say the contrary. But trust thou well that, to me, she is very dear."

"Well then," said she, "therewith must I rest content; but, think not the contrary, Sir Launcelot, there shall no other knight than you joust at Camelot but he will wear on his helm some lady's token."

"That may well be," said he; "howbeit, of your good grace, such is my resolve; for I hold it shame for a wedded knight to wear a lady's token at tournay."

"You will find few of your mind at Camelot," said she, "for to sup wounds and bruises guerdonless is but sorry fare for any man."

"But, madam," said he, "no man goeth guerdonless who rides for honour."

"Trust thou well, Sir Launcelot," said she, "that, were there no sweeter guerdon to be won at our jousts than honour the lists would be void of all but fools."

"Then," said he, "of such fools would I ever be one."

Whereat she laughed in some disdain and moved away.

CHAPTER IV

How Sir Launcelot Won the King's Prize at Camelot

NOW is was ever the custom for the jousts that were at Camelot to be held in the meadows that lay by the river below the town, and here there stood continually the lists, strongly built of good beech wood and having about them many high sieges from which the ladies and gentlewomen might look down upon the prowess of their chosen knights. Commonly the lists stood bare to the storms and rain, but now, at this Eastertide, were they made gay with scarlet cloth and with the banners of many knights which hung around ; while, on the meadows beyond, stood the pavilions of such noble knights as had come from afar to try their strength at the jousts. There now stood the red and white pavilion of King Uriens of Gore, and of his son Ewen ; the black tent of Sir Carados, the giant from the country of Surluse ; the blue pavilion of Sir Tristram de Lyonesse ; and divers others of less note.

Now, as the book saith, it was ever the custom at the Court of King Arthur for the chief tourney of the year to be held at the Feast of Pentecost, for, at that season, were the new Knights of the Round Table made and the vows of the old knights renewed ; but in this year the tourney was cried for the week next following after Easter, because that there was a loud cry from Westminster that the King should ride thither so soon as might be.

So, being minded to bear himself as worshipfully as might be before all those that would there be assembled, Sir Launcelot, after his coming, made daily trial of his black horse *Grain*, which was the courser that he had won of Sir Mawrig, tilting privily in the forest at any marks that he might see, so that his hand might not fail him in the lists ; for, wit you well, that these three years past he had never so much as laid a spear in rest, and so he misdoubted him greatly of his skill.

So, in the end, came the first day of the jousts, a day of clear skies and of fair promise, and, wit you well, it was a

gaily-dressed company that thronged down that day to the lists upon the meadows.

Howbeit, all were in no small measure cast down, and, chiefest of all, the King and Queen, because of the certainty that was in all men's minds that, let who might win the King's prize, it would be one of those that came from afar and not of the Round Table fellowship ; for those two knights, Sir Tristram de Lyonesse and Sir Carados of Surluse, were noised to be the two best knights of the realm, if it were not for Sir Turquin, who was twin brother to Sir Carados ; and, as for Sir Tristram, he was, as all men said, the greatest jousting with sword or spear that the world had yet beheld. Against these two there were of the Round Table fellowship, who might match them in strength, only Sir Lamorak and Sir Palomides, who were both passing good knights of their hands, but, as it was thought, moderately able for those other two. So, among those of the Court of King Arthur there was much misgiving.

Howbeit it is, as all men know, an easier matter to check the flow of a wintry river than to stint the sharp clatter of ladies' tongues when any new matter is toward, and so, as they went on their way to the lists that day, those ladies spoke without cease of the hopes that were within them that such knights as wore their tokens might bear them worshipfully ; and so it was that the noisiest of all those who passed down to the lists were they whose tokens were to be worn by many knights that day, for thereby were they in some measure uplifted with pride ; but such as had no knights to wear their tokens held sad silence, for this was ever accounted to them for shame.

Thus, at the last, they came to the lists, and there, on the grass of the meadows, was a great throng of the common people, men, women, and children, who looked to see the more famous knights, as they rode into the lists, or as they came forth again after breaking a spear or two ; but, of that which befell within, they could see nothing, and so they passed the time as best they might with song and minstrelsy and dancing.

In this wise then did all these good people till the clock smote the hour of noon, and then there came down from the palace the King and Queen, and sat them down on two great thrones that overtopped the lists. Right richly beset were these two, I ween, for, as the book saith, King Arthur was

clothed all in red sendal furred with miniver, and on his head he wore a golden helm round which was coiled the red and golden dragon of the kings ; and, as for the Queen, she was all in green samite sewn with silver, very fair and slender, and over her shoulders hung the two great ropes of her corn-coloured hair ; for so ladies that were young ever wore their hair in those days.

Then, when the King and Queen had sat them down, the pursuivant blew a great blast upon his horn and, therewith, the knights fell to jousting, each against other in pairs, as lot determined. So, within a while, there were many knights discomfited, but all they of chief renown remained ; and then these encountered again, each against other, as lot determined. Thus it came about that Sir Tristram overthrew Sir Griflet, Sir Lamorak overthrew Sir Sagramor, Sir Palomides overthrew his brother Sir Safere, Sir Launcelot overthrew Sir Branadil, Sir Carados overthrew Sir Alisander, Sir Pelleas overthrew Sir Gaheris, and Sir Gawaine overthrew Sir Meliogrance.

Now it was much debated upon, of all those who sat around, that, in these jousts, Sir Gawaine bore on his helm the token of the lady Soronen, who was daughter to Sir Baldwin, and not that of the lady Ettarre as heretofore ; whereat many wagged wise heads, but little was there said at that time because the thoughts of all were on the jousting, and, wit you well, their thoughts were not of the gladdest. For it was not to be denied that, in the clash of these knights that tilted together, matters sped but ill for they of the Round Table. So, when Sir Tristram put Sir Lamorak from his horse with such might that he lay upon the ground in a swoon, there went up from all those gathered round the lists a great moaning, for in Sir Lamorak lay the chief hopes of the Round Table.

Then, next after this, it so was that Sir Launcelot was cast by lot to joust with Sir Carados, and, when these two rode into the lists, men looked to have seen Sir Launcelot quickly put to the worse, for, wit you well, he looked to be but of slender build.

"By my faith ! 'tis merlin against buzzard," said Sir Dagonet, the Jester, to the King.

"Truly," said the King, "it hath such a look."

Then those two knights drew apart and, turning, came together as hard as they might drive, and, as they turned, Sir Launcelot's black horse *Grain* drove to the encounter as

straight and swiftly as an arrow leaves a bow, but the great horse that Sir Carados rode came forward askew, as a bird that faces the gale, and so Sir Launcelot's spear smote Sir Carados upon the side and therewith overturned both horse and rider.

"*Pardie ! Dagonet,*" said King Arthur, who for joy could hardly keep his seat, "this buzzard of thine hath bitten the dust and bitten it hard."

"Truly hath he," said Sir Dagonet, "and my merlin swells into a falcon."

"And wherefore not an eagle?" said the King.

"Sir," said Sir Dagonet, "it profiteth little for a bird that will soar to swell overmuch; else is he like to burst and come to a sudden end."

Then King Arthur and Sir Dagonet turned their faces again to the lists, for, there before them, were Sir Kay the Seneschal and Sir Aglovale, who was brother to Sir Lamorak, fewtering their spears and pushing their horses to the encounter, and, when they met, Sir Aglovale lost his saddle and fell, at which the crowd shouted gladly, for Sir Kay was well liked of the common people, but many of the Round Table knights there were that loved him but little.

Then Sir Tristram overthrew Sir Pelleas, Sir Launcelot overthrew Sir Garhault, and Sir Palomides overthrew Sir Gawaine, whereat the lady Ettarre leaned over the edge of the lists and, from her seat, cried out on high, so that many heard:

"Would that you were dead, false, recreant knight, and then would I have joy indeed," at which Sir Branadil, who was her brother, rebuked her.

Then, at last, it so fell out that, when many full noble knights had been laid low, two only remained who had not been put from their saddles, and these two were Sir Tristram and Sir Launcelot.

Thereupon, the better to refresh those two knights, who had had great travail, King Arthur blew to lodgings for two hours and all the gay throng that was at the lists passed up again to Camelot; and loudly, I wot, wagged their tongues of that which they had seen, for none that was there had weened that Sir Launcelot would have withstood so many good knights, and now, in him, as it had fallen out, lay all their hopes that were of the Round Table fellowship.

Howbeit it is not to be denied that therein had they no such

great comfort, for, as all men said, Sir Launcelot had overcome no knight of worship, unless it were Sir Carados, and he, said they, had been put to the worse chiefly because that his horse had failed him in his need rather than by the might of Sir Launcelot's spear. But Sir Tristram had overborne, among many others, Sir Lamorak and Sir Palomides, who were accounted two of the best knights that ever laid spear in rest. So scant hopes had any but that Sir Launcelot would go down before the weight of Sir Tristram's spear, as had all those other good knights, and so said he himself, but King Arthur held silence and said little of that which he had in mind.

Then, within a while, those two hours drew to a close, and once again they all made for the lists, and, when they were there come and the King and Queen were in their places, those two knights Sir Launcelot and Sir Tristram rode into the midst of the lists, and all the knights and ladies that were there present held silence and stretched forth their necks, like swans, for to see all that they might.

Now Sir Tristram, as the book saith, was a man of great girth and mighty limbs, but only moderately tall, so that on foot Sir Launcelot overtopped him by a hand's-breadth, howbeit in bulk and substance he was plainly the lesser man of the twain, so that, when men saw them together, they likened Sir Tristram to a bull and Sir Launcelot to a stag; and how, said they, could any stag withstand a bull, unless he might flee him?

So those of the Round Table looked for but one ending and were therefore in some part downcast, and so too were the King and Queen, for ever had they hoped that Sir Lamorak would have done battle for the honour of the Round Table fellowship, and, where he had failed, how, said they, could this untried knight prevail? Thus, as they all sat in their sieges in some heaviness, those two knights came together and saluted each the other, and then they drew apart to either end of the lists, and then, when the herald had cried "*Laissez-aller*" they came together with all the speed they might. Then, at their meeting, so great was the skill of each, that either put aside the other's spear with his shield, so that they passed on as far as they might, and then, turning, came together again as it had been thunder. So now each smote the other full upon the hauberk and so hard that both their horses stood up on end upon their haunches, and both their

spears burst like reeds in their hands, yet was neither rider put from his saddle. Then their squires brought them other spears, and once again those two knights hurtled together ; but now it so fortuned that Sir Tristram's horse *Passe Brewel* came not straight upon the other because that, by so little had he escaped being overturned that he was in some part dismayed, and, while he thus faltered in doubt, the black horse *Grain*, that Sir Launcelot rode, came down upon his so straight as any arrow and Sir Launcelot's spear put Sir Tristram clean from his horse.

Now it was the common custom, in all the tourneys of those days, that such knights as were put to the worse with the spear should take their overthrow mildly and so get them from the lists ; for, as is well known to all men, the spears wherewith the knights tilted in the lists were but plain ash poles which could mischief none greatly, unless by mischance with a splintered truncheon ; but the sword is ever a deadly weapon, and therefore not to be lightly drawn, unless men would truly slay. Howbeit Sir Tristram was a man of hot nature, and so, for very shame that he had been unhorsed, he got him quickly to his feet and, drawing his sword, cried out :

" Keep thee from me, Sir Launcelot, for, though my horse hath failed me in some part, yet so shall not my sword."

Now, at these words, there were some that cried " Shame," for, to them, it seemed unmannerly that a knight should take his overthrow so hotly, but, while they so murmured, Sir Launcelot leaped lightly from his horse and said :

" Of a truth, Sir Tristram, thy red horse dealt with thee but scurvily, and against such malfesance can no knight that ever was born endure. Therefore let us now make trial how we may fare on our two feet."

Therewith he drew his sword, and then they dressed their shields before them and Sir Tristram rushed upon the other as though he would hew him in pieces, for he was in truth wood-wrath at his overthrow. So, for a while, he dealt Sir Launcelot such buffets as it was thought no man might endure and live, but ever Sir Launcelot caught the strokes upon his shield or fended them from him with his sword, so that he took no hurt and, all this while, never a stroke gave he in return. Then, within a while, Sir Tristram's fury was in some part abated and, thereupon, Sir Launcelot leaped suddenly aside and smote him lightly upon the helm. At that Sir Tristram rushed upon him anew, as though with intent to slay, but

by no manner of means could he come to him, for ever Sir Launcelot leaped aside and smote him again and again upon the helm, but ever lightly. So they did for the space of half an hour, tracing, traversing, and foining from end to end of the lists. But ever, in this battle of swords, as all men saw plainly enough, Sir Launcelot had the advantage.

Then, at the last, Sir Tristram let cry a great roar like the bellow of a lustful bull and, flinging aside his shield, took his sword in both hands and lashed at Sir Launcelot so fiercely that no man might see his sword-blade, so swiftly did it cleave the air.

"So God me bless!" said Dagonet the Jester, "but here is wood-madness indeed!"

"Ye say sooth," said King Arthur, "for, so Sir Launcelot can endure him till his breath fails, Sir Tristram is but a dead man."

Now, in this, the King but said what all men thought, for it is manifest that a knight without a shield may be smitten here and there without remedy; and so it came about that, when Sir Tristram's breath began to fail him, and he could by no means get past Sir Launcelot's shield, then Sir Launcelot leaped lightly aside and smote him where he would upon the helm and hauberk, but ever lightly, for he had no mind to do him a mischief. Then, at the last, when Sir Tristram's breath was coming in great sobs, so that he might hardly keep his feet, Sir Launcelot smote him an awk stroke upon the sword-arm, so that his sword dropped from his hand, whereupon Sir Launcelot kicked it with his foot beyond the reach of either.

Thus Sir Tristram stood at his mercy, and, for a while, he might not speak for anger, but, at the last, he turned him away to where his squire stood and so got upon his horse and rode from the lists without a word. At this, where before had been silence, there was now loosed a great uproar of tongues, which ran from end to end of the lists, as the tideway overruns flat sands.

"Was ever seen so strong a knight as this Sir Launcelot?"

"Jesu be praised that he had the mastery over that Cornish knight."

"Ah me! would that he had worn my token."

"Or mine."

"Ah! but the Queen would have had him wear hers."

"So I have heard it noised."

"Ye heard sooth; I had it from Dame Tegrane."

"And he would not?"

"I know not, but that he did not."

"Peace. Let us mark where he will bestow the prize. See, even now he cometh to the King's throne."

"Jesu! what a man it is! Oh, my poor heart!"

"A murrain on thy poor heart! Hold thy peace, silly wench, and hearken."

Right, as they thus sat talking, came Sir Launcelot before the King's throne, led thither by a pursuivant on either side. So, as he drew near, the King stood upon his feet and held on high a fair platter of beaten gold. This he held before him for a while in silence, while all that were within the lists waited. Then, in the end, he spoke.

"Sir Launcelot du Lac," he said, "full nobly have you borne yourself in these jousts this day, in that you have overcome all such knights as you have encountered with sword or spear, to the great honour of the Round Table fellowship. Therefore is the prize yours and therefore do we, that be of the fellowship, thank you with all the voice we have that you have so nobly upheld the honour of our Order."

Then, when he had given him the platter, all the lords and ladies that were there seated round the lists rose in their places and loudly clapped their hands; and some shouted on high. So Sir Launcelot stood for a while before them all with the platter held in his two hands, and then, on a sudden, he kneeled on his knees before the Queen and laid it at her feet. At this, once again, all the people shouted, and some there were that nodded their heads wisely and, of the ladies, some that whispered this or that, with many a sidelong glance full-charged with meaning. As for Queen Gueneviere, firstly she stooped down and, taking the platter in her two hands, gave it to a page, and then, once more stooping, she raised Sir Launcelot to his feet.

"Sir," she said, "I thank thee for this thy great courtesy, for never surely was prize more nobly won."

Then, once again, all that were there shouted aloud, and so the King blew to lodgings and they all made back across the meadows to Camelot.

Now for the day following there was appointed, as the custom was, the *mêlée*, or *meddle*, as men now call it, in which six chosen Knights of the Round Table were cast to meet six of those that came from afar. Now, in this encounter, it was

clearly manifest that the Knights of the Round Table were at great disadvantage, for neither Sir Lamorak nor Sir Palomides were so far mended of their hurts that they could take their places in the lists, and this, wit you well, was great loss to the Round Table. So there were chosen in their places Sir Pelleas and Sir Brennor, who were good knights both but full young and, in a measure, untried; and the other four that were chosen to do battle for the Round Table were King Arthur, Sir Launcelot, Sir Gawaine, and Sir Sagramor. Against these six there was, of the other party, King Uriens of North Gore, his son Sir Ewen, Sir Carados, Sir Tristram, Sir Garhault, and Sir Colgrevice, whom men called of Cornwall, for there was another knight of the same name that was of Gore.

So great was the might of these six that, on the night following the day on which Sir Launcelot had won the King's prize, King Arthur sent for Sir Launcelot and said:

"Mebeseemeth, my lord, Sir Launcelot, that to-morn we may have our hands full to withstand six such perilous knights as these, for, wit you well, these two knights, Sir Carados and Sir Tristram, be marvellous good knights, and the others well-tried and strong, and, as for us, we are at some disadvantage because of the hurts of Sir Lamorak and Sir Palomides. Now, therefore, Sir Launcelot, I would charge you, by the love you bear to me and to the Queen, that you do your uttermost in the mêlée, and, in especial, against those two, for none others of us, I wot, may readily withstand them, and I am in some dread that, do what we may, they will be overmuch for us, from which we shall have great dishonour."

"My liege lord," said Sir Launcelot, "all that a man may against these two knights that will I do, and, as for Sir Carados, of him am I in no such great dread, for size alone availeth a man but little, but, wit ye well, my lord, King Arthur, that Sir Tristram is a passing good knight and may well put us all to the rebuke."

"Jesu forfend!" said the King, "for then were we all shamed past remedy."

"Well," said Sir Launcelot, "God helping me, I will do what I may."

Howbeit there were few, among those that were gathered together at Camelot at that Eastertide, who had any great hopes but that they of the Round Table would be put to the worse in the mêlée, for they held Sir Pelleas and Sir Brennor

to be, in no wise, such good knights as Sir Lamorak and Sir Palomides.

So, when the appointed time came and all were in their places, then the pursuivants blew their horns and, thereupon, those twelve knights all hurtled together, and so the *mêlée* sped this way and that, with ever-changing fortunes, for the space of an hour or more; and many were the spears that were broken and many were the saddles that were emptied that day; but all such as were put from their saddles lightly got their horses once again and thrulled anew into the thick of the press. And then, while men smote here and there, not nicely weighing their strokes, about the hour of noon, by great misadventure, Sir Launcelot's spear broke upon the hauberk of Sir Carados and the truncheon pierced his heart so that he fell from his horse dead.

Thereupon the King cried "Ho!" and "Halt!" as the custom was, and at that the *mêlée* ceased suddenly, for that any should meet his death in friendly jousts was ever a heartlie sorrow to the King.

Then, when they had borne Sir Carados away to his pavilion, the judges must needs give the award, and, when they had taken counsel together, they all, with one accord, delivered their judgment, which was that the King's party had gained the mastery over the others, and that the knight who had borne himself best in the fray had been Sir Launcelot du Lac. At that Sir Launcelot rode up to where the judges sat and said to them, so that all might hear:

"My lords, Sir Brastias, Sir Ulfus, and Sir Bedivere, gramercy of your good words, but I fear me, my lords, that you lean too greatly toward me in that I am of the Round Table fellowship and not of those that come from afar; for very sure am I that Sir Tristram de Lyonesse hath borne himself more worshipfully in this business than I, for although it may be that I have, by happy chance, overthrown more knights than he, yet hath he not so much as once been unhorsed, whereas I was put from the saddle by Sir Carados."

"Aye, but foully struck from behind," cried all the throng.

"None the less, my lords, a man may not so nicely measure his strokes in a *mêlée* but that he may, by mischance and without malice aforethought, strike one from behind, and of such mischance a knight must bear his part. Therefore, my lords, I pray you, of your good grace, that you bestow this prize where it be worthily due, for full well wot I that I have

not truly gained the degree, inasmuch as I have been put from my horse, and, furthermore, by sad mischance, have I slain a knight in friendly joust."

With those words Sir Launcelot turned his horse and rode out of the lists, whereupon the judges, after some little debate, adjudged the prize to Sir Tristram. Howbeit, of those who sat round the lists, there was not one but held that, if weal were rightly weighed with woe, the prize was Sir Launcelot's; and some there were that mocked him for his backwardness.

"Meseemeth," said Sir Dinadan to the lady Allowrie, "that this young knight hath more love for buffets than for the smiles of ladies, for how else could he put such dishonour upon the Queen, whose knight he is?"

"As for that," she said, "I make but scant dole; howbeit, it marvelleth me greatly that so goodly a knight cannot see fairness where fairness is."

"Well, sweet lady Allowrie," he said, "it is but the part of a fool to smile upon a blind man. Thank God then, if you may, that all men are not thus blind and turn your smiles where other smiles meet them."

"Mercy on us!" she cried, "and where would that be?"

"Madam," said he, "there is no need that you should look afar."

"Ah! well, Sir Dinadan," said she, "bear you bravely in the Queen's prize to-morn and I may even smile upon you as you would have me smile."

"In good sooth it is a weary world," said he, "when the only road to a lady's smiles lies through bruises and buffets. Meseemeth we be all mad in this Court of Camelot. That a warrior king should weigh men's merits by their prowess in battle or tourney is within understanding, but that fair ladies should deal out their smiles by the same measure passeth all reason."

"As for that," she said, "how else can we know of a surety that a knight loves us, so he will not endure a few buffets for our poor sakes?"

"In good and honest sooth, sweet lady," said Sir Dinadan, "I am no great lover of buffets; and, that I will to-morn, with a fair face, take such hard strokes as God may send me for thy sake, proves me a better lover than either Sir Launcelot or Sir Tristram, for both those poor fools love buffets for their own sake; wherefore their ladies owe them but small thanks."

"Alas! that they have here no ladies," she said, "for, as it seemeth, they both love elsewhere, and therefore we poor damsels of Camelot might be fiends from hell for all the looks they bend on us."

"Well, then, you may even thank God, lady Allowrie, that there are others."

"There lieth before me, I fear, no other course," said she.

"And thus it is," said he, "whether I bear me worshipfully in the fray or the contrary I will yet lay bare my bruises for your good pity."

"My pity shall you have and more," said she, "an you show me the Queen's prize, but not else."

"You are a cruel mistress," said Sir Dinadan.

"Nay, a kind one," said she, "for I aim to spur you on to high deeds for your greater honour."

"Well," said Sir Dinadan, "I will essay as much as any knight may, and God send me soft falling."

Now, as the book saith, Sir Dinadan bore himself right well in the tilting for the Queen's prize, which was on the third day of the tourney, for he overthrew first Sir Lucan and then Sir Kay, but, at the last, he was himself unhorsed by his brother, Sir Brennor. And then was Sir Brennor overthrown by Sir Gawaine.

So, in the end, Sir Gawaine gained the degree, for Sir Lamorak and Sir Palomides were still sick of their hurts, and Sir Launcelot and Sir Tristram held them aloof, as the custom was with those who had won prizes upon the first day or upon the second day.

Then, when the Queen had placed it in his hand, Sir Gawaine took the prize, which was a rich mantle of cloth of gold sewn with pearls, and placed it upon the point of his spear and so spurred lightly round the lists till he came to where sat the lady Soronen, and there he abashed his point till the mantle rested upon her knee, whereat she smiled with great sweetness upon Sir Gawaine and, taking the mantle, laid it upon her shoulders.

"An I were your blow-about nephew," Sir Dagonet said to the King, "I had liefer meet Sir Launcelot and Sir Tristram in the one battle than the lady Ettarre, should she and Sir Gawaine anon meet face to face."

"Howbeit," said the King, "she is but served as she herself served the lady Gulrig."

"And many another to boot," said Sir Dagonet; "trust

thou well that it now repenteth her sorely that she made not better weather with Sir Pelleas."

"Ah!" said King Arthur, "there hath that young knight wisely chosen, for the lady Nimue is a passing fair lady and well beseen withal." For, as the book saith, it was the lady Nimue's token that Sir Pelleas bore upon his helm at the Eastertide tourney at Camelot,

CHAPTER V

How the Queen Cast her Love unto Sir Launcelot

NOW, upon the evening of the third day of the tourney, there was made a great feast in the Round Hall of the palace at Camelot, and thither came all such as, in those three days past, had broken spears within the lists. So other tables were set within the Round Hall, for at the Round Table itself they might not sit who were not of the fellowship ; and at the high daïs sat the King and Queen, and King Uriens of Gore, and there too sat Sir Launcelot, Sir Tristram, and Sir Gawaine because that they had won prizes in the lists. Then was all that company very merry, and loud was the laughter that rang through the hall. So, at the last, the Queen would have Sir Tristram sing to them, for it was the common talk of all the land that no singer so sweet and strong had been heard since the days of Bleise, who was the teacher of Merlin. Therewith she made send for Sir Tristram's harp from his pavilion, and, when that was come, he pulled upon the strings moodily for a while, as one whose thoughts are far away, and then, on a sudden, he began to sing, softly and low at first but ever swelling stronger, till, in the end, all those lords and gentlewomen that were there sat as though under a spell, because of the sweetness of his singing. So, among others, sat the Queen. Now the Queen, as the book saith, had eyes of blue and a wide mouth that was red as the poppies among the corn, and, as she sat and listened, her lips fell apart and her eyes shone strangely, and so, within a while, she turned to Sir Launcelot, where he sat upon her left hand, and said :

"How sweetly doth he sing of love !"

"Sweetly indeed," said he.

"To me," said the Queen, "he seemeth a full noble knight, for all that he is of Cornwall."

"Of that am I assured," said he, "for he hath borne himself in the lists more nobly than any knight that ever yet I saw."

"And yet, Sir Launcelot," said she, "you put him most woefully to the worse."

"That," said he, "was but by the hazard of the lists. Had chance befriended him more and me less it might well have been otherwise."

"That is not the common talk of Camelot," said the Queen, "nor yet the judgment of the King, for he holds you to be, of the two, by much the better knight."

"Madam," said he, "therein doth the King praise me overmuch, for, wit you well, I had the advantage over him but by a little."

"Then must I, too, do in like wise as doth the King," said she, "for I should in truth be but a recreant dame did I not hold my knight to be the best."

"I thank you, madam," said he.

"And ever you will be my knight, Sir Launcelot?" she said.

"Ever, madam, will I be your knight."

"And guerdonless?" she asked, with eyes that sought his and then drooped swiftly to the board.

"Nay, madam, not guerdonless; for, wit you well, I aim at high things, but, so I may, by any means, win honour for you and the King, then therein lies my guerdon, and with that am I well content."

"Do the knights of Guienne aim only at honour and never at love?" said she.

"They aim at both," said he, "for honour and love are bound together by ties which are as old as Christ."

"And you cannot divorce them?"

"For good sooth I cannot divorce them."

Thereat, for a full minute, the Queen held silence.

"Your speech, Sir Launcelot," she said at the last, "is beyond my understanding. Honour I know and love I know, but, with me, the two are ever warring the one against the other."

"And with which lies the victory?"

"So far with honour, but now I misdoubt me sorely," said the Queen.

Now at these words Sir Launcelot's face, I wot, waxed very stern.

"Fair lady Gueneviere," said he, "when King Arthur first made me knight upon the field of battle, I then and there swore fealty to him for evermore. Then, madam, as you wot well, Merlin, whom he had left to rule this realm, died and King Arthur made short sail for Britain. Then, some two

years later, he sent Sir Gawaine over the seas to Guienne praying me, of my love to him, that I would come hither and help him raise his Round Table fellowship from the ways of beasts, into which they had fallen. Therewith I came, as indeed I needs must, and—having come—I rode away within a month on quest adventurous. Wot ye, madam, for what cause I rode away ? ”

“ Full well wot I,” she said ; “ it was to put the length of the land betwixt you and me.”

“ It was to put the length of the land betwixt me and the foulest deed a man may do.”

“ And what prithe is that ? ” she asked.

“ I wot of no deed more foul than treachery to the King who made me knight and to the friend who holds me in trust.”

“ Is it treachery,” she said, “ to take that which he casts aside ? ”

“ Madam,” said he, “ it is beyond belief that the King casts you aside.”

“ And why beyond belief ? ” said she.

“ Because, madam, of your great beauty and fairness, which all men may plainly see.”

“ Would that you saw as you speak, Sir Launcelot,” she said.

“ Lady Gueneviere,” he said, “ wit you well that I am no empty flatterer but speak only that of which I am assured.”

“ Alas ! then, that the King sees not as you see,” she said and so sorrowfully withal that Sir Launcelot’s heart was moved with pity.

“ I cannot believe,” he said, “ but that the King loves you dearly.”

At this she laughed, not merrily, but as those laugh who see death before them, whereat many that were in the hall turned and gazed.

“ In such matters, Sir Launcelot,” she said, “ trust thou well that a woman errs not.” Then when he still held silence, not knowing in truth what to say, she said : “ Ye say that I be fair, and yet, as all the world may see, the King hath no need of me ; and you, forsooth, you ride northward for five years because you too have no need of me. What profiteth me my fairness, then, if all men turn from me ? I might with no less gain be cross-eyed or a hunchback.”

“ Madam,” said he, “ meseemeth that there you greatly err,

for then would men shun and dread you, as they shunned Queen Ornedrun, whereas now all men love you dearly."

"And Sir Launcelot among them?" she asked of him.

"In good and honest sooth I do," said Sir Launcelot. "It marvelleth me that you can hold me in doubt."

"I doubt any love," said she, "that hides away for five years and makes no sign."

"But now, madam," said he, "am I not come back once more?"

Now, so soon as he had spoken these words, Sir Launcelot wist full well that he had spoken foolishly for, had he but weighed his words, he would not have so said.

But the Queen leaped upon his words as a cat leaps upon a mouse.

"And now, Sir Launcelot, that you have ridden back," she said; "what then?"

"Now that I have ridden back," said he, "am I not your chosen knight, sworn, if need be, to do battle to the death in any cause that may be yours? Was it not for your honour that I took and gave many sore strokes in the lists these two days past?"

"For my honour," she said, "it may well be, but not for my love."

"For both, fair lady."

"My lord, Sir Launcelot," said the Queen, when she had dwelt on his words for a while, "you speak sheer foolishness, or, rather, you speak words with which neither your heart nor your deeds accord. For, as for love, what sign make you? You do but sit still and gaze away, and so you put me to no little shame, for, as well you wot, Sir Launcelot, a lady may, by the laws of the lists, deny nothing to the knight who wears her token and rides to victory."

"But, madam," said he, "I wore no token."

"Mercy on us!" said the Queen, "how you traverse and trace with words! You were my knight and rode to victory, and my token you surely would have worn but that, as well you wot, no man may wear the Queen's token."

"And, prithee, why not, lady Gueneviere?" said he.

Now, at this, was the Queen, in her turn, in some part abashed, so that she bit upon her lip and held long silence. Whereupon, within a while, Sir Launcelot said:

"Madam, as to that, it is well known to men of all degrees that none may wear the Queen's token because that the

Queen is too high to be won by the thrust of a spear or the stroke of a sword."

"That is for the Queen to say," she said.

"Nay," said he, "it is for the King to say."

"Mercy on us, Sir Launcelot!" she cried, "what high words be here! Report hath it that Sir Tristram is somewhat less nice in the matter of Queen Isolde."

"As for that," said he, "Sir Tristram may do as to him seemeth best, but thereby shall I in no wise be governed; for full often it so falleth out that, where one man seeth right, another seeth the very contrary."

"Sir," said she, "wit you well that, in this matter, there will be found few at Camelot who see as you would have them, for that which a man hath won with his spear, that will he surely turn to his profit. See how, even now, Sir Gawaine pushes his advantage with the lady Soronen; nor, by the cast of her countenance, would she seem greatly to chide him therefor."

Therewith she pointed with her finger to where, in the shadow of wall, those two sat laughing softly together and speaking in close whispers; and, when Sir Launcelot spoke no word, she said:

"Men brave not wounds and bruises for naught."

"Surely not," said he, "but for honour they may well brave them."

"Oh!" she cried, "I am weary past bearing of your honour. You should have been monk, Sir Launcelot, in place of knight."

Wherewith she turned her back upon him and passed swiftly from the hall.

Now, when the Queen had thus departed, Sir Launcelot sat for a while in great heaviness of mind, and then he too passed out of the hall into the cool of the garden that lay about the palace. Grim and dark, I ween, were his thoughts that night, for before him, as sure as death, he saw coming upon that noble fellowship of the Round Table the shadow of great sorrow and dishonour.

So he went forth into the garden, for he had a mind to pass out thence into the street and so down to the meadows beside the river, there, if might be, to put away his thoughts from him. Thus, as he went he became aware of one in white who rested upon a stone seat that was nearby. So, in some wonder who it might be that thus sat alone in the darkness,

he drew nearer, and then he saw that it was the lady Thora, one of the youngest of the Queen's maidens, who was daughter unto the good knight, Sir Sagramor.

"Lady Thora," said he, "what make you thus here alone? Have you no mind to hear the sweet songs that Sir Tristram is even now singing to his harp?"

"Sir," she said, "I do not hold them to be sweet, but, contrariwise, foul, and for this very cause came I hither that I might be beyond the reach of their foulness; for here may one hear the music, which is sweet enough and yet, by the grace of God, escape the words."

Now, when he heard these words, Sir Launcelot was glad beyond measure, for here, thought he, was a fair young damsel whose thoughts were in accord with his and who looked with scant favour upon the common customs of the Court. So he said:

"Thus it was in some part with me, for I too was driven forth into the night air by base thoughts."

"Base thoughts!" quoth she; "and prithee, Sir Launcelot, were these base thoughts your own or another's?"

"God knows," said he, "for meseemeth they are common to all."

"You were talking with the Queen," she said. "Were the base thoughts hers?"

"Nay," said he, "how could base thoughts have any part in one so fair and honourable."

"Fair she is, in good sooth," said the lady Thora, "but is she honourable?"

These words she spake as though to herself and not aiming at a reply, but Sir Launcelot said:

"Truly she is, as I believe, honourable."

Howbeit, for all he spoke as he did, the damsel at his side had no ears for his words. Straight before her she bent her gaze, busy, as it would seem, with her own thoughts. Then, on a sudden, she gave a great sigh and, following that, she laughed shortly as though at that which pleased her. So, within a while, she turned her to the knight who sat beside her and said:

"Oh! Sir Launcelot, Sir Launcelot, would that you had worn my token at the tourney."

And then, when he held silence, not knowing in truth what to say, she said:

"For then what honour would have been mine! Thus,

when you had won the King's prize, you would have proffered it to me on bended knee, while all the ladies round would bite their lips with envy."

"Fair lady Thora," said Sir Launcelot, "truly would I counsel you, who are new to the Court and yet of tender age, that you give no token of yours to be worn by knight at tourney."

"And why not I pray you?" said she.

"Because, wit you well," said Sir Launcelot, "that there are customs thereby depending which are not seemly."

"And what of them?" said she. "I know of them, and what of them, I say? Wherefore not seemly? If a knight wears a lady's token, he loves her above all others, and she him; else had she not bestowed her token."

"And at the next tourney he will, as like as not, wear another's token," said Sir Launcelot; "marked you the face of the lady Ettarre?"

"That did I," she said, and laughed as she said it; "if bitter looks could kill, the lady Soronen would now be lying as cold and stiff as Carados. But tell me truly, Sir Launcelot, would you wear another's token at the next tourney, had you worn mine yesterday?"

Then, when he made no answer, she said:

"Will you wear token of mine at the next tourney, Sir Launcelot? Will you?"

So, as she spoke, she clasped his arm in both her hands and besought him with her eyes. But he turned away and took small heed of her pleading.

"Lady Thora," said he, "of that you must, I pray you, hold me excused, for, trust thou well that no lady's token will I wear at the next tourney nor at any tourney following."

"And why are you thus resolved?" said she. "Is it because of some ancient vow?"

"Ye may well say so," said he, "for this vow that I hold by was made on the same day that I was wed to the lady Elaine."

"Ah!" said she; "the lady Elaine! Is she then so passing fair?"

"To me," he said, "she is so fair that I can see but little fairness in others."

At that she raised her brows as though in some surprise.

"Can you not even see the Queen's fairness?" she asked; and Sir Launcelot answered:

"I cannot even see the Queen's fairness."

"Then," said she, "what hope is there for others?"

Then, even as she spoke, and as Sir Launcelot bethought him how he had best make answer, there arose from within the hall a sudden great uproar, with the angry shouts of voices and a noise as of cups and platters that some rude hand swept from the board.

"Meseemeth," said she, "that King Arthur's good knights have fallen to quarrelling, as they ever must who steep themselves in wine."

"And as ladies ever must who set their minds on that which is another's," said he. "Therefore, trust thou well, lady Thora, and forget it not, that there are worthier quests in life for ladies than the luring of weak knights from their allegiance."

"It may well be," said she, "that you speak sooth, but I, for one, cannot conceive of such, were that knight but Sir Launcelot."

Wherewith she sped away round the corner of the palace and was gone.

CHAPTER VI

How Sir Tristram and Sir Launcelot Swore Friendship for Evermore

EARLY on the morning next following, it seemed good to Sir Launcelot, still heavy with his thoughts, that he should ride forth into the dew-laden sunlight and drink in, if might be, some of its sweetness. Furthermore, he had it in mind to make fair trial of a new sorrel horse that he had gotten of Sir Lucan, for whom it was over-masterful and hot. To this end he donned his hauberk and helm, and slung upon his shoulders a blank shield, for full loth was he to make himself known in the streets, because of the noise of his victory in the King's prize. So, with a strong spear in his hand but black heaviness in his heart, he rode down to the meadows beside the river, nor did any that he passed on the way wot who it was that rode forth thus early. Past the lists he rode full soberly, and along the meadows on the right bank of the river where it turns sharply towards the Peron that Merlin had built over the body of the lady Colombe.

So it came about that, within a while, the freshness of the air and the sweetness of the morning entered into Sir Launcelot's soul and blew aside the dark clouds of his gloom. For, wit you well that, when a man is in the springtime of his life and hath beneath him a right noble courser, it is no easy matter for him to hold dark thoughts for long on as fair a morning as ever God made. And a fair morning it was, in very sooth, on which Sir Launcelot rode down to the meadows of Itchen. High above his head a lark sang in the blue sky and a heron flapped its way heavily toward the sea. Very pleasant too was the damp smell of the meadows, so pleasant indeed that, within a while, Sir Launcelot's heaviness passed from him as dew passes away in the morning and his heart waxed lightsome as the song of the lark above his head.

Therewith, as his mood changed, he fell to whistling gently, and then, from the sheer joy of the morning, and the better to make trial of his horse, whether it would turn from the spear or no, he set his spear in rest and ran, here and there,

little mock tilts at the tufts of grass and wild flowers that showed in his path. How sweet and beautiful, thought he, was the world and yet what baseness underlay it all; for murder and lust, as it seemed, was ever in the hearts of all created things, and beyond these things they had but little thought.

Therewith his mind turned to the lady Thora, who looked such mild innocence and who yet aimed so strangely wide of innocence. Thus, as he mused, it seemed to him that it would be a worthy deed and a knightly to dispose one of such tender age and sweet appeal to higher thoughts. Truly it would, thought he, and more worshipful a deed withal than the overthrow of weakling knights and the breaking of ash spears. Howbeit, within a while, as he so mused, he put these thoughts from him, for, as it seemed to him, there might well lie more peril to him in those soft grey eyes than in the sword of Sir Tristram or the spear of Sir Lamorak. Therewith he shook his head in doubt, and, the better to banish all thoughts but those of the moment, he set his horse once more to the gallop and thrust with his spear to right and left of him as though at phantom foes.

Thus, as he rode, it so fortune'd that there lay in his path a tuft of rank weeds, and at this tuft he straightway drove his horse as hard as he might go.

"Ha!" cried he, as his spear pierced it, "in the very centre of the hauberk! even as I smote Sir Carados."

Now, even as he spoke these words and withdrew his spear from the weeds, he became suddenly aware of a big knight that bore down upon him with shield dressed and spear aventred right wickedly.

"Now is this fallen out as I would have it," thought Sir Launcelot, "for now shall I make full trial of the sorrel." Therewith he bent in his saddle and set his spear in rest and, anon, the two dashed together like thunder. So fiercely did they meet that both their spears burst as though they had been straws, and yet, for all this, was neither rider shifted in his saddle.

"*Pardie!*" said Sir Launcelot, "but here is a stout knight indeed! For never dealt I to any a shrewder blow than that."

With that, both knights turned their horses about and drew their swords, and so lashed full fiercely each at other, for the space of many minutes, as men possessed.

Now, with every stroke that Sir Launcelot gave and took, his wonder grew, because of the great might of the stranger knight.

"By my head! Sir Stranger," he cried, "you are as lusty a smiter as ever I met within these five years past."

Now, so soon as Sir Launcelot had thus spoken, the stranger knight lightly turned his horse aside and dropped the point of his sword.

"Now," said he, "I know full well with whom I have to deal, for that is the voice of Sir Launcelot and none other; and, wit thou well, my lord, Sir Launcelot, that I have no great mind to take any further measure of thy sword, for, even yet, do my bones ache most woefully of the strokes that thou has dealt me these three days past."

"Sir," said Sir Launcelot, "an ye be Sir Tristram de Lyonesse, as I think well ye be, very sure am I that I have no greater love for your buffets than you have for mine. Howbeit, I would have you bear in mind that by no deed of mine have we come to this encounter for, wit you well, Sir Tristram, that I was riding these meadows right soberly and peacefully when you bore down on me with spear in rest as though I were your mortal foe."

"As for that," said Sir Tristram, "I cry you mercy for, to speak sooth, I deemed that you had been that knavish knight Sir Palomides, whom, God helping me, I will slay when and where I may."

"My lord, Sir Tristram," said Sir Launcelot, "it marvelleth me greatly that you should speak in this wise of Sir Palomides, who, wit you well, is a full noble knight and well loved of King Arthur."

"Well, sir," said Sir Tristram, "in this can you and I not lightly be of one mind, for I hold Sir Palomides to be a full traitorous knight and a recreant withal, for, wit you well, Sir Launcelot, that he casteth his love continually unto the lady Isolde, and thereof made he open avaunt last night before all the Court, which by no manner of means will I abide."

"Alas!" said Sir Launcelot, when he heard these words, "that two such noble knights should thus be at debate."

"Sir," said Sir Tristram, "an Sir Palomides would but hold his peace and avoid the kingdom of Cornwall, then might we two well accord, but thereto will he in no wise consent; therefore, because of his vaunting, was it appointed between us two last night that we should meet here upon the meadows

at the Peron of the lady Colombe and so do battle to the utterance ; but in this hath he failed me and therefore is he a recreant knight and a false."

"Sir Tristram," said he, "very sure am I that Sir Palomides is no recreant knight, for he hath ever borne himself well and knightly, whether in the jousts or in battle, and, but it be Sir Lamorak, there is no better knight of the Round Table, either of his hands or heart."

"For all these things," said Sir Tristram, "I care nothing. But that this knight hath failed me most shamefully I wot well, and therefore do I rightly call him recreant and traitor."

"As for that, I dare boldly undertake," said Sir Launcelot, "that for some good cause he hath been hindered from keeping his tryst."

"Well then," said Sir Tristram, "an that be so, he shall do battle with me so soon as he be able, for such words as he spake within the hall last night I will in no wise suffer from any man that beareth life."

"Alas! Sir Tristram," said he, "that you should so seek to mischief so good a knight, for, as for the quarrel that is between you, very sure am I that we may shape some remedy whereby you two may well accord."

"As for that," said Sir Tristram, "I see no remedy but that Sir Palomides should keep him from the kingdom of Cornwall wholly, for thither may I not come by reason of my exile, and thereof doth he make continual profit to my great discomfiture."

"My lord, Sir Tristram," said Sir Launcelot, "meseemeth that there is a remedy, so you will but be advised in this by me. But if, in your heat and anger, you push this quarrel to the uttermost, then is my remedy of none avail ; for, wit you well, Sir Tristram, that King Arthur hath it in mind to make you of the Round Table fellowship, because of the great nobility that is in you. But, so long as you bear against Sir Palomides such hot and open enmity, it is not to be denied but that he would be full loth so to do, for, as all men know, he abhors above all else strife between any two knights that be of the fellowship."

"Sir Launcelot," said Sir Tristram, "trust thou well that I would right gladly be of your fellowship, which all men know to be the noblest fellowship of knights in the world ; but, in good sooth, I may not so lightly as you would wish accord with Sir Palomides, sith we both love the same lady,

and, therefore, must we two ever be at enmity ; for, wit you well, Sir Launcelot, that, whereas mine uncle, King Mark, greatly loves Sir Palomides, he holds me ever in continual despite, and, for this cause, hath he banished me his kingdom for the space of ten years, so that this Palomides cometh and goeth as he would and I may not so much as come within those marches, upon pain of my head."

" Well," said Sir Launcelot, " I have in mind a remedy for this disease, so you will but take it."

" Show me your remedy," said Sir Tristram, " that I may judge thereof, for, wit you well, Sir Launcelot, that, where reason is, I am not wholly stubborn."

Then was Sir Launcelot well pleased, but, for a while, he held silence, as though turning over in his mind that which he would say. Then, in the end, he said :

" Sir Tristram, an the lady Isolde loves you as all men say she doth, then, meseemeth, it would profit you better than the slaying of Sir Palomides that she should ride away with you to some fair castle where you could hold her in peace and safety against the world."

" Good counsel, truly," said Sir Tristram, " and with this one hindrance only : that I have no such castle to which I may bear away my lady Isolde, for my own castle of Meliodas lieth in Lyonesse, which is within the Kingdom of Cornwall, and thither I may by no means adventure, upon pain of my life."

" But were such a castle yours, how then, my lord, Sir Tristram ? "

" As for that," said he, " were such a castle mine, even as you have counselled me so would I gladly do, if but for the vexing of mine uncle Mark and for the discomfiture of Sir Palomides, for greatly doth that smooth-faced Saracen err if he thinketh to have this lady away from me so lightly."

Therewith, as he so spoke, his brow knit with anger and he gripped the truncheon of his broken spear with fierce fingers.

" Fair sir," said Sir Launcelot, with whose aims this mood sorted but ill, " were it not more seemly and more knightly were you so to do for the love of the lady Isolde, rather than from despite of King Mark and Sir Palomides ? "

" Love for her I have in plenty," said Sir Tristram hotly, " else had I not ridden out this day at the hour of prime, when my bed seemed very sweet to me, to do battle with this accursed Saracen."

"Do you, in very truth, love her above all other ladies that breathe?" he asked.

"Truly I do, so God me bless!" said Sir Tristram.

"Well then," said Sir Launcelot, "let us make a short conclusion. I have in the country of Sarras, which is in Northumbria, a strong and fair castle which I have named Joyous Garde, wherein is a ward of forty men, and I have ships which ply to and fro between Berwick and Bayonne, which is in Guienne; and all these things, Sir Tristram, shall be yours, so you will but lightly accord with Sir Palomides, for the strengthening of our Round Table fellowship and the better safety of the realm."

"By my head!" said Sir Tristram, "that is a fair offer and a noble."

"Well," said Sir Launcelot, "upon this covenant it is thine for the having, for in good sooth I cast me never to come there more."

"And this covenant?" said the other; "I prithee rehearse it me once again."

"It is this," said Sir Launcelot: "that thou eschew for evermore thine enmity against Sir Palomides, for, else, very sure am I that the King will forfend thee our fellowship and so shall we lack the noblest knight that breathes."

When he had so spoken, Sir Tristram held, for a long while, silence. Then, at the last, he spoke.

"My lord, Sir Launcelot," he said, "I thank thee of thy great courtesy to me ward and of the great gift whereof you would have me profit; and by this covenant will I abide, and upon this covenant will I take the right noble gift that thou profferest. So Sir Palomides will keep him from my marches and cast no more love unto the lady Isolde, then will I accord with him right gladly and for evermore. But, an it so be that he come at any time betwixt us twain, then, upon no surety nor for no fair language, will I keep my hand from him, but I will seek him endlong and overthwart for twelve months and a day till I destroy him. And by this covenant I will abide by the faith I owe to God and by the holy Order of Knighthood."

"With that am I well content," said Sir Launcelot.

"And now, Sir Launcelot," said the other, "for this thy courteous gift and for the great nobility that is in thee, I hereby make oath and vow by the four Evangelists that I will never, from this day on, in battle, joust or tourney, lay

spear in rest against thee nor draw my sword upon thee ; but every cause that may be thine, whether good or ill, that will I henceforth espouse with sword and spear and with all the might of my body, so long as I am on live."

"And for these fair words of thine, Sir Tristram," he said, "I will in like wise make avow, by the body of Christ, that never shall spear or sword of mine be against thee in joust or battle, but ever on thy side, so long as there be breath in our two bodies."

Therewith these two knights did off their helms and then they embraced each the other with right goodwill, and so, greatly uplifted in spirit, they rode their homeward way. Thus, as they rode, they spoke of many matters, and, when they had much spoken, it seemed good to them both that Gouvernail, who was servant unto Sir Tristram, should, on the morn, make for Tintagil Castle and there get the ear of Dame Bragwaine, who was waiting-woman to Queen Isolde, and with her devise some means by which the lady Isolde might, upon a day, ride to Caerglewen upon Severn and there await the coming of Sir Tristram. Thus, then, was it appointed between them.

Now, when they had made an end of all these things and were fully resolved how they should deal in the matter, they came to the gate of the palace, and it so fell out that there they happened upon Sir Palomides, pale and wan and leaning upon a staff. Now, as the book saith, this Saracen was of the country of Greece, and a tall and goodly knight withal, very fair of face and form and bigly made, so that, in all the land, a goodlier knight might scarce be found.

So, when they thus encountered, "Ha ! Sir Palomides," Sir Tristram cried on high, "how was it that thou failedst me at the Peron of the lady Colombe this fair morning ?"

"Sir," said Sir Palomides, "trust thou well that I failed thee not of my good will, but God is my witness that by no manner of means could I get my saddle by reason of broken ribs, and for these hurts I have thee to thank, Sir Tristram. Howbeit, when I am once more whole, I will meet you when and where you may appoint and so bring to a conclusion that which is between us ; for though, by some good fortune, you have now put me to the worse this twice, yet do I deem myself as good a knight as you and as worthy of any lady's love."

At this Sir Tristram's face waxed very red and his hand

went lightly to his sword hilt, for, as the book saith, he was ever a knight of hot nature.

"Now, by my head!" he cried, "this is past all bearing."

"Sir Tristram, Sir Tristram," cried Sir Launcelot in great misease, "is it thus that you keep your covenant?"

Then was Sir Tristram greatly shamed, so that, for a while, he might not speak. Then, at the last, he said:

"Sir Palomides, I cry you mercy, in that I spake hastily and without nicely weighing my words. For, doubt not, sir, that it is truly in my mind to accord with you in this matter, for the sake of this noble knight, Sir Launcelot, who would have us two to be in amity, each to other. Therefore, Sir Palomides, will I, by the Grace of God, put from me, from this time forth, all enmity to you ward so long as you keep you from my path. Howbeit, wit you well, Sir Palomides, that should you essay the lady——"

"Fair sirs, fair sirs," Sir Launcelot cried, "I pray you make an end of this unseemly debate, for, an ye be of one mind in this matter, the less said, the sooner mended. Therefore, my good lords, I require you both by your knighthood that ye lay your hands each in other's and so depart honourably and without further words. For words be the weapons of women and not of men."

Therewith those two knights did as Sir Launcelot would have them do, and, when each had saluted other, they went their ways without further words between them.

Thereupon Sir Launcelot sought out the King and told him all that had befallen and all that was in his mind; how that he had promised the Castle of Joyous Garde to Sir Tristram, so only he would accord with Sir Palomides, and also of the great hopes that he held that King Arthur would make Sir Tristram of the Round Table fellowship. At this King Arthur knit his brow as one who hears that for which he has little liking.

"By my faith! I love these Cornish knights but little," he said, "and meseemeth that it were full perilous that one of them should hold so fair a fortress as this Castle of Joyous Garde; for, should he prove traitor, then would it go full ill with us in the North, for wit you well that Earl Pelles is a man of little weight to withsay in any wise so strong a knight as Sir Tristram."

"Sir and liege lord," said Sir Launcelot, "an I might counsel you in this, it would be that at this time you make

Sir Tristram of the Round Table fellowship, for I dare undertake that he will prove unto you a good knight and a true, and one that will perform good service for the maintenance of this realm. And, as for his fealty to you ward, unto that will I pledge my head that I shall lose it should he prove traitor, for I dare boldly say that he will prove a good knight and faithful unto your person, my lord, King Arthur, and, as for might and prowess with sword and spear, there is none in all this realm that may match him."

"That is but empty talk," said the King, "for twice with mine own eyes have I seen him overmatched of you, Sir Launcelot; for although, in the *mêlée*, the degree went to Sir Tristram by reason of your great courtesy, yet was there not one of those who sat around but held that you were the better knight of the twain."

"Sir," said Sir Launcelot, "methought they leaned somewhat to me ward because that I was of the Round Table fellowship, and Sir Tristram in some wise an enemy, being, as he is, of Cornwall, and that, sir, were a lasting dishonour to us all."

"Trust thou well, Sir Launcelot," said the King, "that, hadst thou been of Cornwall and Sir Tristram of the Round Table, the judges would, none the less, have bestowed the degree upon thee, Sir Launcelot."

"Well," said he, "that is as it may be, but, as for Sir Tristram, I am very sure that there is none in this kingdom of Logris that is better disposed toward the Round Table fellowship than he; for, forget it not, my lord, King Arthur, his uncle Mark hath ever been full unfriendly to him, and for them of Cornwall he hath therefore but little love; and, were he in my Castle of Joyous Garde, I am very sure that he would hold in truage for you the whole kingdom of Northumbria, which might else fall away from its allegiance, as it did before my coming, for soothly a stronger arm is needed there than that of Earl Pelles."

Now, when Sir Launcelot had so said, King Arthur turned and left him, for, wit you well, he was very greatly disquieted, and for this cause that, ever since the sound of words had meaning for his ears, Merlin had taught him that they of Cornwall were false and traitorous; and that which the child learns, the man puts not readily away. So, for all Sir Launcelot's fair words, the King had scant liking for Sir Tristram. Howbeit, it was very plain to his understanding that, but for

some good knight within the walls of Joyous Garde, the Kingdom of Northumbria would be in great jeopardy of falling away from its fealty, and, furthermore, King Arthur wist full well that he would by so much the more readily keep Sir Launcelot at Camelot were another in his Castle of Joyous Garde, and thereto his heart was very greatly inclined.

So, all that night, he lay awake and, on the day next following, he sent for Sir Launcelot and said :

“ My fair lord, as you have counselled me in the matter of Sir Tristram, even so will I do, and, at Pentecost, I will make him of the Round Table fellowship ; and, as for the matter of Joyous Garde, in that Sir Launcelot, I would have you do even as ye list and I will not in any wise withsay you, for very sure am I that all that you would have me do is for my greater honour.”

Thereupon—seeing that the King was so well disposed—Sir Launcelot asked of him yet another boon.

“ Sir,” said he, “ there is yet another matter whereof I would speak with you, and it is this : Sir Tristram hath appointed to meet the lady Isolde at Severn, within six days of Pentecost, and, by your good will, my lord, King Arthur, I would ride with him as far as Caerglewen.”

Then, at that, the King asked of him to what end would he thus ride with Sir Tristram.

“ My lord, King Arthur,” said he, “ wit you well that there are many about the Court of King Mark who would gladly do Sir Tristram a mischief, should they, by mischance, happen upon him unawares, and to me it seemeth that this adventure that he hath in hand may be noised abroad to his great peril, and, if this be so and he fall into some bushment, then would I gladly be at his side to lend him the aid of my sword and spear.”

These words Sir Launcelot spake from his heart, and he spoke them in honest truth, for he ever held it to be unknighly and cowardly to speak outside the truth. Howbeit, though he so spoke in all honesty, yet deep down in his mind was ever the secret thought, “ So shall I put many leagues between me and the blue eyes of the lady Gueneviere.”

Now that Sir Launcelot should thus ride away again from Camelot so soon after his coming was but little to the King's liking, and yet to say him nay was more than he was able for, because of the great love that he had unto him ; so, in the end, he bade him go with Sir Tristram, but charged him

withal that he should be no means push either west of Severn nor north of Trent and, further, that within twenty-one days of his parting, he should come again to the Court that was at Camelot. So Sir Launcelot thanked him, well content.

CHAPTER VII

How the Queen and Sir Launcelot Rode on Hawking in the Warwell Woods

AT the time when Sir Launcelot spoke to King Arthur of Sir Tristram there were yet thirty days before the feast of Pentecost, and, for those thirty days there was no remedy but that Sir Launcelot must needs abide at Camelot, for, at Pentecost, it was the custom that all true knights must renew their vows, and until that day was come King Arthur might not make Sir Tristram of the Round Table fellowship. And so it was that, while that month ran, Sir Launcelot bore himself ever courteously toward the Queen, but wit you well that of such courtesy the Queen had but little pleasure, for in truth she loved him beyond measure and as one out of her mind, so that for the hotness of her love she might hardly eat nor sleep. Therefore, because of that month that he must be at Camelot, Sir Launcelot ever dwelt in great misease of mind, for never wist he what the day might bring forth, and, so courteous was he of nature, that he might not readily put the Queen to the rebuke, and so was he ever sore put to it to keep the midway betwixt discourtesy and dishonour.

Thus, on a day, it fell out that the Queen would have him ride with her to the Warwell Woods, for she had a young jèr-falcon that she had a mind to make trial of with the lure.

"There are betimes robbers in these woods," she said, "but so you be at my elbow, Sir Launcelot, I shall have no cause for dread."

With this that she would have King Arthur was in full accord, for such was his custom that never would he have the Queen go on hawking, but some stout knight such as Sir Lamorak or Sir Palomides or Sir Gawaine were at her side.

So, on a day of bright sunshine, those two rode forth together into the woods, and, so merry and gay and free from care was the lady Gueneviere, and so busy with the charge of

her jèr-falcon, that all Sir Launcelot's fears quickly passed from him and he too became of gladsome mood. Then, when they had ridden a league or so, she must needs fly her hawk at a pigeon that crossed their path, but the bird was but ill-trained and, though she twirled her lure for many a minute, it came not back no more,

"A murrain on the bird!" said she. "I fear me it hath flown past recovery, but, as for that, I make no such great dole, for my falconer hath hawks and to spare, and this bird was but an ill-trained jade. Come, let us put our horses to the gallop, if haply we may yet chance upon her."

Therewith she smote her palfrey lightly with her whip and pushed forward as fast as she might up a smooth lawn that gave to the southward. So, when he saw her thus suddenly depart, Sir Launcelot, as best he might, drove his sorrel after her, but, by no manner of means, could he come up with her, so fleet was the palfrey that she rode. Thus they rode for a mile or so, each seeking to outspeed the other, but ever the Queen gained and ever she looked behind her over her shoulder and mocked Sir Launcelot of his tardiness. Then, on a sudden, where the forest grew thick around them, the Queen drew rein and, anon, as it seemed to Sir Launcelot, she swayed heavily in her saddle, as one that swoons.

"Oh! my heart, my heart!" she cried, "it faileth me."

So, when she thus cried, her palfrey slackened its pace and Sir Launcelot, spurring to her side, took the reins and brought it to the halt. Then lightly he leaped to the ground and with both his arms caught the Queen even as she fell from the saddle in a dead swoon; and so, leaving the horses to do as they listed, he carried her to a mossy bank and there laid her down.

So for a long while she lay with closed eyes, white and still as one that is dead. When he saw this, Sir Launcelot wist not what he might best do, for, as it seemed to him, the life had left her body quite, and vainly did he cast about in his mind for some means by which he might recover her, if of life there still remained any.

So presently, like one possessed, he ran this way and that through the woods seeking water, though full well wist he that of water in those woods there was none. Then, wearying of his quest, he ran back as hard as he might to where the Queen lay, and kneeled down beside her, and then greatly

marvelled he that, though her face was white and wan, her lips were yet so red.

Right as he thus kneeled beside her in great heaviness of mind, all of a sudden the lady Gueneviere's eyes opened widely upon him and she smiled up at him, not as angels smile, but rather the contrary.

Therewith Sir Launcelot's brow grew very dark and he leaped to his feet right wrathfully.

"Come, madam," said he, "sith you are so far mended we had best get to our saddles."

At that she smiled no more but bit with her white teeth hard upon her lips.

"Mercy on us Sir Launcelot!" she cried on high. "You are accounted a valorous knight and fearless, and yet, in good sooth, you are the veriest craven in all this realm of Logris, for you flee in fear from that which you would have."

"I flee shame," he said, "which pray Heaven I may ever flee."

"Shame!" she cried. "What is shame but a rope which fools fashion wherewith to hang themselves?"

But never a word said Sir Launcelot, for, even as she spoke, he was far from her, running hither and thither among the trees to make fast the horses. So, when he had got these, he brought the Queen's palfrey to where she stood. And she, with never a look nor a word, leaped straightway into the saddle and, smiting her horse thrice and yet again with the whip, galloped from him as hard as she could drive. As for Sir Launcelot, so soon as he had got his horse again, he rode back full soberly and heavily to Camelot.

So, as they sat that night at dinner, King Arthur said before them all:

"How sped your chase to-day, my lady Queen?"

"Ill enough," said she, "for I lost my falcon."

Now, it so was that on the King's right hand sat Queen Morgan le Fay, who was wife to King Uriens of Gore, and she—as the book saith—was a small dame and dark as night, but erstwhile of a great beauty, now faded with the frosts of many winters.

So at the lady Gueneviere's words, she leaned across the King and said, so that all might hear:

"When the mind strays from the chase the hawk strays from the lure."

"But my mind strayed not from the chase," said the Queen; "I flew my hawk at a pigeon and she came back no more."

"When the mistress stoops to a pigeon, there is no further need for the stooping of the hawk," said Queen Morgan le Fay; for it was ever her custom to speak in riddles. But none greatly heeded her words, and least of all King Arthur, for he was busy with other thoughts.

So it fell out that, two days later, the King rode away for London, being pushed thereto by the bruit of troubles in the east.

"Guard you well the Queen," said he to Sir Launcelot, when he was on his horse, "for full well wot I that she is over venturesome and greatly apt to push rashly into peril. There are yet more unruly knights and lords in this realm than I would wish."

So, as he spoke, the Queen stood by and heard, and right glad was she, I wot, of that which he said; but, as for Sir Launcelot, he had but scant joy of the King's words, for therein he saw all manner of peril.

Then when he had bidden them all farewell, King Arthur rode forth out of the gateway, and the Queen turned to Sir Launcelot and said:

"How strange it is that the King would have you guard so closely that by which he sets so little store."

"As for that, madam," said Sir Launcelot, "I dare say that, in this matter, you greatly err, for else had the King not put you in my keeping."

"In what wise do I err?" said she.

"You err, madam, in that you hold the King to have no love for you."

At this the Queen laughed loudly.

"My lord, Sir Launcelot," said she, "you are but a fool."

"So it would seem indeed," he said, "seeing that you have now told me so this twice."

Then, as they thus stood there in the courtelage, each planning the contrary to the other, they both became aware of a young knight that came toward them from the postern door of the palace.

"Ah!" said Queen Gueneviere, "here, I wot, cometh a greater danger to my poor fame than any unruly lords or bandit knights that roam this realm."

"Say ye this of Sir Meliogrance?" said he.

"In good sooth I do," said she, "for, trust thou well, Sir Launcelot, this young knight sees in me greater fairness than do either you or my lord, King Arthur."

"Truly, madam," said Sir Launcelot, "we see in you great fairness, as indeed must all men."

"Yes, but therewith rest ye both content," said she, "whereas Sir Meliogrance, if I mistake not, hath a mind to push to further adventure."

"Let him have a care how he deal," said Sir Launcelot, "else shall he and I be at some debate."

"Mercy!" cried the Queen. "Have you never no thought, Sir Launcelot, but for battle, buffets, and blows?"

"Madam," said he, "trust thou well that for buffets and blows I have no more liking than another, but, when there lies no path to honour but by means of these, then must every true knight strike his hardest or be for ever shamed."

Right as he thus spoke there came to them Sir Meliogrance, who saluted the Queen full courteously.

"Madam," said he, "may I, with as little boldness as may be, make proffer of my company to shield you from the perils of the forest, should you have it in mind to ride on hawking? I warrant me you would lose no falcon were I but with you."

"How then?" she said. "Have you a horse with wings, Sir Meliogrance?"

"Nay," said he, "but a passable knowledge of falconry, which I have practised so long as I could bestride a horse."

"Well then," said the Queen, "God willing, I will, or long, make trial of your skill; for my lord, Sir Launcelot, here will hunt no quarry but that which brings him honour, and so is like to go meatless; but you, Sir Meliogrance, an I misread you not, will prove no such laggard in the chase."

"Madam," said Sir Meliogrance, "so you will but make trial of me, then will I essay all that a man may."

So Sir Launcelot departed and left them standing there, and a well-pleased man was he, I wot, for now, as it seemed to him, might he have, in some part, a quittance from his charge of the Queen; for this Sir Meliogrance was held of

all men to be a good knight and well enough able for any unruly fellows that they might happen upon in the Warwell Woods. And, should he deal in any wise unknightly or discourteously with the Queen, then would he, Sir Launcelot, deal with him in such manner as might seem best. Thus he comforted himself with divers thoughts of this kind.

So it was that, for four days after this, Sir Meliogrance and the Queen rode forth together daily ; and every night, before the whole Court, would they talk openly of that which they had achieved ; and every day did Sir Meliogrance, in the sight of all those knights and gentlewomen, cast more and more love unto the Queen, nor did she in any wise seem affronted. But all this manner of doing did the Queen devise for to bring Sir Launcelot to better subjection, for little recked she of Sir Meliogrance whether he were with her or no, for she held him in contempt.

So, within a while, Sir Launcelot began to be troubled in mind because that Sir Meliogrance was ever at the Queen's feet, and he resolved to speak of this matter with Sir Dinadan, who, as the book saith, was held of all men to be the wisest knight of any that sat at the Table Round. So, upon a day, he went to Sir Dinadan and told him all that was in his mind, and then he said :

" Sir, I pray you give me your counsel in this matter."

So Sir Dinadan mused for a while and then he said :

" Sir Launcelot du Lac, with spear or sword I have never seen none knight that might match you, but, wit you well, Sir Launcelot, that, for all your might in the lists, you are in other matters as simple as a newborn calf. Howbeit, sit you by and let me deal in this matter, but hearken well to the words that I shall say this night at dinner."

With that Sir Launcelot was well content and he departed to his own place. So, when they were all seated that night at dinner in the Round Hall, Sir Dinadan said to the Queen :

" Fair madam, our lord, King Arthur, as all men wot well, when he rode to London, required of the noble knight, Sir Launcelot, that he should guard you well from all the common perils of life. But now is Sir Launcelot in some doubt in this matter, for, as it seems to him, were he to do plainly as he was charged, then would there right soon be a void place in this our Table Round. Howbeit, to deal in this wise he would

be full loth, for ever, an he so may, would he eschew all strife within the fellowship. Now, therefore, how would you counsel him ? ”

“ Sir,” said the Queen, “ should I be in any jeopardy, trust thou well that I shall make short appeal unto my lord, Sir Launcelot. But now am I in no peril for the which I am not wholly able of my own strength ; and, as for one to guard me, wit you well that Sir Meliogrance is a passing good knight and well skilled in all manner of venery, and of a cheerful countenance withal, and, therefore, when I go on hunting, I am well pleased to have him with me, for, wit you well, Sir Dinadan, that Sir Launcelot is of so grim a countenance that the very deer of the forest flee from him faster than ever they flee my greyhounds.”

Now, all this the Queen said of set purpose, for to spur Sir Launcelot to greater jealousy, for thereby, as it seemed to her, would she bring him the more quickly to her side. But of none avail, as the book saith, were all her crafts, for Sir Launcelot reasoned with himself thus : that there lay more peril in riding forth on hunting or hawking with the Queen than in all the bandit lords that roamed the realm ; and, as for Sir Meliogrance, his fears concerning him came to a short end, for he had it from Sir Dinadan, who had it from the lady Allowrie, whose woman had it from Dame Tegrane, that, though Sir Meliogrance was as one besotted for love of the Queen, she, for her part, but held him in continual scorn and disdain. Thus, then, it fell out that the Queen’s words fell wide of their mark, for, by Sir Dinadan’s counsel, Sir Launcelot held him continually aloof, so that ever Sir Meliogrance rode with the Queen into the forest ; and ever, for anger that her wiles failed her, she would rail ceaselessly at Sir Meliogrance while they so rode, but, when they sat at meat in the Round Hall, then would she smile upon him her sweetest, so that, between her railing and her smiles, he was like to go out of his mind.

Now speak we shortly of the great friendship that arose at that time between Sir Launcelot and Sir Meliot de Logris, a young knight who dwelt in the fair Castle of Pallandour. This Sir Meliot, for all that he was yet one of the Queen’s white knights, by reason of his tender age, was tall and broad and big-limbed, and Sir Launcelot, seeing his size and strength, bethought him that here was that out of which might well be fashioned a knight who would do good service for the King

and the realm. So then he spoke to Sir Meliot that they should ride forth together betimes and make play together with spear and sword in one or other of the fair lawns that were in the forest. Nothing loth, I wot, was Sir Meliot so to do, for he esteemed himself highly and hoped to learn from Sir Launcelot such tricks of lance and sword as would make of him as good a knight as any that lived.

So these two knights rode forth together, and, when they were come to some fair lawn within the woods, then would Sir Launcelot teach Sir Meliot all that he might.

Now, when the Queen espied that Sir Launcelot was ever away from the Court and paid no manner of heed to her riding with Sir Meliogrance, she was very greatly vexed in her mind, but, because of her pride, she would not ask for tidings of him from any that were about her. Howbeit, at the last, so fiercely did she chafe, that, upon a day, she said to her tire-woman, Dame Tegrane :

"Where is my lord, Sir Launcelot, these days ? "

"He rides abroad with Sir Meliot, teaching him tricks of lance and sword," said Tegrane. "Men say that he aims at making of him as good a knight as he."

"That will he never do," said the Queen, "even though he may labour at it till the coming of Christ." Then, within a while, she said : "Tegrane, would you ever serve me in all things ? "

"Truly would I, madam," said she, "even to the death, for good or ill."

"That do I honestly believe," said the Queen. "Well, then, Tegrane, I would bring Sir Launcelot to subjection."

"That surely were a small matter," said the woman ; "where the Queen smiles, men cannot but swoon."

"Peace, fool ! " said the Queen. "I seek not empty flattery but some means to an end which is, as it would seem, beyond my compass. You have a shrewder wit and a craftier than I, who know no surer means than those of smiles and sighs and sidelong glances, and, betimes it may be, mock smiles bent upon another ; and these miss their mark, Tegrane—most woefully they miss their mark."

"But, madam," said Tegrane, "do they in truth miss their mark, or is it that they miss their mark so little that the mark flies to nightly pursuits for safety ? "

"Right gladly would I think so," said the Queen, "but in

truth I know not. Meseemeth it is in very sooth a saintly knight."

"Saintly knights are ever simple," Tegrane said, "so it may well be that some means may be found whereby his saintliness may be in some measure abated."

CHAPTER VIII

How the Queen was Rescued from Vortigern's Tower

THUS, on the day next following, Sir Launcelot and Sir Meliot de Logris rode together within the beech woods that lie toward Basing, as their custom was at that time. Very fair and sweet was the day, for the May sunshine painted all the world a golden green, save only under the trees, where the flowers carpeted it blue. The birds sang as the season bade them and all nature sang with them, but there was no song in Sir Launcelot's heart, for, between him and song, came many dark thoughts. And so, ever as he rode, his mind turned lightly to the lady Elaine and to his son Galahad, where they dwelt far away in the Castle of Corbin with Earl Pelles.

"Were she but here," he thought, "I would have no fears"; and therewith he resolved that, when the King was once more come to Camelot, then would he ask of him that these two might be given some lodging in the town, if haply there was no room for them in the palace. Therewith, the better to ease his mind, he turned to Sir Meliot, who rode at his side, and said :

"Meseemeth here be a fair lawn for a friendly tilt. What say you, Sir Meliot, shall we breathe our horses and essay our skill?"

Thereto Sir Meliot agreed readily enough, for, in good sooth, it was to this end that they had ridden forth; but, when he learned the manner of Sir Launcelot's teaching, then was he in some part affronted, for he held himself to be big enough to endure the best that any knight might put forth, and thereto was Sir Launcelot not inclined; for, as the book saith, he leaned his own spear against a tree and then bade Sir Meliot bear down upon him with his spear in rest as hard as he might drive and put him from his saddle, if so he might. Ten times they so met and, every time, Sir Launcelot turned aside with his shield the point of the other's spear and passed on unshaken. Thereupon Sir Meliot was greatly put out of countenance, and so threw from him his own spear and bade

Sir Launcelot run at him even as he had done ; and so did Sir Launcelot, and, at the first meeting, he smote Sir Meliot full upon the hauberk, but, out of courtesy, he let the spear slip through his hand so that there was no weight behind it. At this, wit you well, Sir Meliot was an angry man, for he was full young and, as it were, swollen with pride.

"Am I a child that I should be thus dealt with?" he cried. "I, who overtop you by an inch or more and whose years are but three short of yours! For, wit you well, Sir Launcelot, that, young though I be, I have overthrown many a good and tried knight in mine own country. Drive at me now, Sir Launcelot, as you would were I Sir Tristram, and God give the advantage to the better man."

Lightly laughed Sir Launcelot.

"Well, Sir Meliot," he said, "have your will in this; but wit you well that this is not of my seeking."

Wherewith they got each one his spear and so departed a little way, and then, turning, hurtled together as best they might. Thus they came together right fiercely and, when they so met, Sir Meliot was put clear and clean from his saddle, but Sir Launcelot was shaken no more than is an oak tree when a child leans upon it. At this Sir Meliot rose to his feet not a little abashed.

"Sir," he said, "I cry you mercy, for now I see and understand plainly that you are by many degrees overmuch for me."

"Of that need you have no shame," said Sir Launcelot, "for these things come to no man but by patience and labour, and I dare undertake that, with years, you will be as good a knight of your hands as any that lives."

So then Sir Meliot asked him right humbly that he would make of him as good a knight as he might, and to this Sir Launcelot was readily consenting, for thereto was he greatly moved for the better strengthening of the Round Table. And so, till the sun was low in the heavens, those two knights drove their coursers hither and thither about the lawn, tracing and rasing after the manner of knights that joust, but ever with spears loosely held, so that each did other no great hurt. And, thereafter, they lighted down from their horses and did in like wise with their swords, but ever giving tender strokes for fear of mischief.

Then, when they had so done for the space of three days, Sir Meliot said:

"Sir, I prithee tell me soothly do you hold me to be able enough now for Sir Lamorak?"

"Nay truly," said he, "you are yet very greatly short thereof, for I hold Sir Lamorak to be as good a knight as any that beareth life."

"Well then," said Sir Meliot, "all this that we have done together availeth me nothing, for, but I may slay Sir Lamorak, I care not whether I live or die."

So Sir Launcelot asked him in few words for what cause he would thus slay so noble and courteous a knight as Sir Lamorak.

"Sir," said he, "he casteth love this many a day past unto the lady Yvonne, and that may I by no means endure."

"Sir," said Sir Launcelot, "it repenteth me sorely that you should, as at this time, meddle with so noble a knight as Sir Lamorak, for, wit you well, he is a passing good knight and overmuch for you."

"That may I well believe," said he; "howbeit I have a mind to essay him, for wit you well that, but I may have the lady Yvonne away from him, I care not whether I live or die."

"Well," said Sir Launcelot, "full loth would I be that you two should be at debate for any such matter, and, wit you well, Sir Meliot, that, should you essay him, you will put your life in great jeopardy, for, but it be Sir Tristram, there is no knight that I wot of that is big enough for Sir Lamorak. Howbeit, for the sake of King Arthur and for the better maintenance of the realm, I will make of you as good a knight as within me lieth."

So, for many days after this, these two would ride forth together into the forest and there make play with spear and sword, and, in the meanwhile, the Queen bit upon her lips and ever made enquiry of Dame Tegrane: "Where is my lord, Sir Launcelot?" and ever the answer came back that he was riding in the forest with Sir Meliot and "A plague on this Sir Meliot!" cried the Queen.

Now, Dame Tegrane, as she had been bidden, laboured long in her mind to devise some remedy in the matter as to which the Queen had spoken with her, for thereunto had she great will; and so it was that, on a day, some midway between Easter and Pentecost, she came to the Queen, where she sat in her chamber, and whispered in her ear. Thereupon, as she so whispered, the Queen nodded her head and, anon, laughed

softly as at that which pleased her. Thereat Tegrane, too, laughed and they were both very merry.

Thus it fell out, some two days after this, as Sir Launcelot and Sir Meliot rode homeward from the forest that, when they were come to the palace yard, Tegrane ran to them, as one runs who is in great distress, and, when she was come to where Sir Launcelot sat his horse, she cried out :

“ My lord, my lord, alas for the evil tidings that I bring.”

“ Well,” said he, “ make a short end, for sighing and tears will avail you nothing.”

“ It is this then,” said Dame Tegrane, “ the Queen is in the Tower of Vortigern, held prisoner there by Sir Turquin, the bandit knight of Surluse.”

“ God defend us ! ” cried Sir Launcelot ; “ these be dread tidings indeed. And what of Sir Meliogrance ? Was he not with the Queen ? ”

“ Sir Meliogrance,” said she, “ rode off for the country of Gore this day at the hour of undorne. So, when he was gone, then did the Queen make long enquiry for you, Sir Launcelot, seeing that the King had charged you with the safety of her person, and so, when she might by no means find you, she rode forth with none other than Felmar, the falconer, in her company.”

Now, when Sir Launcelot heard these words, his brow, I wot, grew black as thunder, for, as it seemed to him, this had so fallen out by reason of his own malfeasance, for, had he been at the Queen’s side, as he had been charged, then had this not befallen or else had he been slain. Therewith he turned to Dame Tegrane and said :

“ And what of Felmar ? Is he dead ? ”

“ Nay,” she said, “ he fled. How else could he do ? Sir Turquin had with him a score of men, and Felmar is no practised knight such as thou art, Sir Launcelot.”

“ Well,” said he, “ be that as it may, you did well to bring me word, for the matter is in truth a simple one. I will summon a score of the Round Table knights and we will straightway to Vortigern’s Tower and so slay this bandit knight and bring hither the Queen again.”

“ My lord, my lord,” said she, “ that may not be ; no, by the faith of my body ! that may not be, for bethink you, my good lord, of how the noise and scandal of this adventure would mischief my lady’s fair name, and that, wit you well, Sir Launcelot, were great pity ; for, as at this time, there be

none that wot of this, only you, my lord, and Felmar, and him have I promised that his tongue shall come out by the roots an he so much as whisper of this to any that lives."

So then Sir Launcelot asked of Dame Tegrane what she would advise, and she said :

" My lord, wit you well that in this you must deal alone for to eschew the noise and scandal, for else it cannot be doubted but that the Queen shall bear the full weight of the King's anger, for many a time hath he commanded her that she ride not forth on hunting but with some good knight in her company."

Then, when she had so said, Sir Launcelot understood and saw plainly that she did but speak truth, so he bade her get with all speed to his chamber and, when he had put away his horse, he went thither and there he found her waiting.

" Now," said he, " advise me in what wise I had best deal."

So she advised him that, so soon as he had unarmed him, he should get him to horse forthwith and take with him, as a means to his end, a ball of twine and a rope and so get to the Tower of Vortigern as fast as he might, and there set the Queen free in such manner as might seem best to him.

So he did as she counselled him, and, when Tegrane had brought to him the rope and the twine, he rode forth into the night upon his black horse *Grain*.

Now this Tower of Vortigern, wherein the Queen was held prisoner, was well known to all the dwellers at Camelot, for, as the book saith, it had been built of old times by Vortigern, when he was King of Britain, and in it he himself, as it so fortunated, had met his death at the hands of Aurelius, who was brother to Uther Pendragon and king before his time. This tower now, in these latter days, had but scant plenishing, for no man dwelt therein, but, when King Arthur hunted and found himself far from Camelot, then would he betimes lie there for the night.

Thither then rode Sir Launcelot, as swiftly and as privily as he might, through the Warwell Woods and a good league beyond. Very stern was his brow as he pushed his good horse through the night, but sterner yet, I ween, would it have been could he but have seen Dame Tegrane after that he had ridden forth, for she rocked to and fro with laughter, so that she might hardly speak, but ever and anon, in the midst of her laughter, she would say :

" God speed my lady Gueneviere."

Now, it so was that this night on which Sir Launcelot rode forth from Camelot was the night of the May full moon, and, within a while, as he made toward the tower, the moon rose upon his path white and silvery clear. So then Sir Launcelot thanked God for the better light that there was, and pushed his good horse forward as fast as he might go.

So, for two hours, he rode, and then, at the last, he came to where the tower stood, tall and silent in the night. No light of torch or candle saw he anywhere, nor any sound of men stirring within or without ; so then, when he was still a full bow-draft distant, he made fast his horse to a tree and walked on his feet to where the tower wall rose before him.

Now, when he was there come, Sir Launcelot was in some little doubt how he had best deal, for by no manner of means, as it seemed to him, could he come to the knowledge of where the Queen was lodged or of where lay Sir Turquin and his men. Thus, as he stood and looked, he saw before him in the wall, on which the moon now played, three narrow windows, which climbed the wall with crooked leaps, so that no one lay above the other. And, while he so looked, suddenly, from between the bars of the middle window, there came forth a lady's hand which waved a white cloth to and fro in the silent air. Thereupon, in great joy, Sir Launcelot came swiftly below the window and cried out softly : " Lady Gueneviere, lady Gueneviere," whereat once again the hand waved silently. So then he cast about in his mind how best he might get him to that window and so pass through, and then he bethought him of the twine that he had with him and of the rope that Dame Tegrane had given him. So he made fast the twine to the rope, and, having so done, he aimed to throw it within the window. Twice did he miss his mark and the ball came back to him, but, at the third trial, it passed through into the blackness within and, forthwith, the rope began to climb the wall in quick leaps. So then Sir Launcelot called out to the Queen that she should make the rope fast to the middle bar, and, when she had so done, he placed his foot against the bole of a thorn tree that stood below the wall and pulled upon the rope with all his might. Now, as the book saith, so strongly was the bar built in that his sinews seemed like to burst with the labour that he put forth, but, at the last, it came forth and fell to the earth dully. Then Sir Launcelot dealt in like manner with another bar and, thereafter, but one bar remained. So, when the Queen had

made fast the rope to that, he climbed lightly up and leaped within the chamber.

Within, as he there stood, all was at first darkness, but, anon, his eyes saw more clearly, and then he became aware of the Queen, who stood still beside the door, all in white sendal, for her riding dress lay upon a couch that stood beside the wall. Now, at this Sir Launcelot stood in some wonder, for to him it seemed a strange thing that the Queen should be there alone and, as it appeared, unguarded; but, at the time, he paid but little heed to this, for all his mind was busy with the thought of how best he might bring her to safety. So, when he asked the Queen of those others that were in the tower, she told him that Sir Turquin and his men had drunk much wine and that now they all slept heavily below.

"Now Jesu be thanked!" said he, "for now may you well escape their malice without further adventure." So, with that, he would have made the rope fast about her, wherewith to lower her to the ground, but for that, wit you well, she had no present mind.

"Sir," she said, "trust thou well thus, for this which thou wouldst have me do, I am not yet able, for I am not yet fully recovered and I fear lest I may swoon and fall," and, in truth, it is not to be denied that her breath came quickly, as with one who has been running.

"Madam," said he, "bethink you well how you stay here longer, for in good sooth we should be in great jeopardy were Sir Turquin and his men to awaken."

"They will not awaken," said she, "for thus it ever is with men who have drunk deeply, and, so you push me not unduly, within a while, my strength will come to me again."

With that she sank upon the couch and there lay white and trembling. But with her words Sir Launcelot was but ill pleased.

"Madam," said he, "I pray and beseech you that you bestir you, for very sure am I that there is greater peril a thousand fold in abiding here than in coming to the ground by means of this rope."

"Sir Launcelot," said she, "to you it may seem but a light matter to make down a wall upon the end of a rope, but trust thou well that to me it is no light matter, for I dread it very greatly. Feel how, even now, I tremble."

"It is the cold," he said; "you were at fault to put off your riding-robe."

"It was wet with the rain," said she, "and I feared an ague."

"Rain!" said he, "there hath no rain fallen at Camelot."

"Well here," she said, "it rained right dismally."

Therewith he felt her riding-robe, and it was dry to the touch as a faggot that lies within a cloister.

"I marvel greatly," said he, "that it hath dried thus quickly."

"Well," said she, "erstwhile it was wet, and so it be dry now, then God be thanked."

"Dry it is," he said, "and therefore, madam, had you best put it upon you, for, till that be done, we may by no means get from hence."

"It marvelleth me," said she, "that one so valiant as Sir Launcelot should be in so great dread of Sir Turquin."

"I am unarmed," said he, "and a knight unarmed is but as a child against men in harness; but chiefly, madam, I fear for your good name and fame, for, were the noise of this to get abroad, tongues at Camelot would wag most evilly."

At this the Queen for a while held silence. Then, on a sudden, she cried out:

"As for my good name and fame, what recks it? What care I for the noisy tongues of men and women? What care I for the Round Table or for those foolish knights that sit around it? Doth any there speak me fair, as this Sir Turquin speaks me fair? I make little doubt but that he would love me passing well in his Castle of Balrig, whither he would bear me."

As thus she said, she hid her head within her arms and wept as one out of her mind, whereat it is not to be denied but that Sir Launcelot would have been moved to some pity but for the words she spoke, in which, as it seemed to him, lay such treason as might hardly be believed.

"Madam," said he, "these be terrible words that you speak."

"To thee, Sir Launcelot, that may well seem terrible words," she said, "for thou art a knight of thy hands and bound by strong vows; but what wouldst thou of me? Wouldst thou have a loveless woman sing like a bird?"

"There be many at Camelot, lady Gueneviere," said Sir Launcelot, "that love thee truly, as thou knowest full well."

"Aye, they love me after their fashion with fair words and salutations and 'God save you, madam,' but these things are

but as drops of sea-water to slake the thirst of one who dies of drought. What profiteth it me to be loved from the far side of Itchen? Is that good meat for a hungry heart? An this Sir Turquin proffers me stronger fare, were I not a fool to turn my back on him?"

"God grant," said he, "that you speak but in jest."

"By the faith I owe to God," said the Queen, "I jest not, Sir Launcelot. I am resolved on love, and, if there be none for me at Camelot, then will I to Balrig with Sir Turquin."

Now, at these words, Sir Launcelot's heart stood still with fear and sorrow, so that he wist not what he did, for here, as it seemed to him, was the Queen speaking such treason as might not even be thought of.

"Madam," said he to the Queen, "this is wood-madness."

"Well then," said she, "I am wood-mad."

"But this Sir Turquin," said he, "is a bandit knight and a rebel against King Arthur."

"What of it?" said she. "He knows at the least how to love."

"What know you, lady Gueneviere, of his manner of loving? Report gives him but an ill name."

"This much at the least I know," said she: "that he hath ridden many a mile and put himself to no small peril for my sake; also that he hath, so far, dealt with me right courteously, and, furthermore, that on the morn he would bear me to his Castle of Balrig, in the country of Surluse, there to hold me against the world. Is not this proof enough of love? Is there any at Camelot that would deal in like wise for my sake?"

"Meseemeth," said he, "that Sir Turquin might do all these things for despite of King Arthur, or to hold you to ransom, madam, rather than for love of your person."

"Am I then so withered and hateful?" she cried, "that no man may love me for myself? Oh! Sir Launcelot, you are cruel beyond measure."

And therewith she wept anew, in great sobs, so that her whole frame shook.

"Fair lady Gueneviere," he said, "full well you wot that there be many of the Round Table who love you truly."

"Truly they may love me, Sir Launcelot; but, as I said erstwhile, their love is but a love of empty, foolish words such as monks and greybeards use, for lack of stronger means."

"Now, lady Gueneviere," he said, "it is in truth you who

are cruel, for am I not come hither, at no little peril to myself, for love of you ? ”

At this the Queen turned her about upon the couch where she lay so that her face looked upward at Sir Launcelot, where he stood above her ; and, as she so turned her round, her weeping ceased and she laughed long and loudly.

“ By my faith, Sir Launcelot,” she said, “ you must hold me a very fool indeed to suppose that you came hither for love of me.”

“ For what else, madam ? ” he said.

“ Why, *certes*, for love of King Arthur,” she said, “ and in some part, it may be, for to eschew the noise of this adventure ; but, trust thou well, Sir Launcelot, it was by no means for love of me.”

Now, at these words, Sir Launcelot stood still and wist not what to say, for in truth he was in some part ashamed that she thus understood him, and, when she saw him thus silent and not saying her nay, the Queen’s wrath waxed hotly against him.

“ Well mayest thou abash thy head,” she cried. “ Fie ! For shame ! that so renowned a knight should speak so bigly and yet make such small performance.”

“ I speak,” he said, “ of such love as a knight may with honour bestow upon his Queen, and not of that which is lawless and unseemly.”

“ Then,” said she, “ you speak in a tongue that I know not ; for, trust thou well, Sir Launcelot, that of all this I am full weary, and that which I now seek is that which every woman seeks and that for which, as it would seem, I alone go starving.”

Then, once again, Sir Launcelot could find no words wherewith to speak, and so, within a while, the Queen spoke again.

“ I would have you to know,” she said, “ that this Sir Turquin is a goodly and a courteous knight, and little doubt have I but that I shall fare right well in his Castle at Balrig. Howbeit, were there any at Camelot that bade me stay, and with such a voice as I could hear, then would I surely stay.”

“ But, madam,” said he, “ I do bid you stay ; with all the voice I have I bid you stay.”

“ Nay, Sir Launcelot,” said she, “ with but half your voice only, and with that half for which I have no ears. Speak with the other half and I will stay, or go back to Camelot with you, as you list. By the four Evangelists I swear it.”

“ I cannot speak, madam, with the tongue of dishonour, for

liefer would I die, aye, in good surety would I ; and, so you choose, lady Gueneviere, for to abide here, in this tower, to the everlasting shame and dishonour of us all, then will I, too, abide here and, all unarmed as I be, I will fight Sir Turquin and his men with my naked hands until I am slain."

"That would avail you nothing," said she, "nor yet King Arthur, nor yet my fair name. For bethink you, Sir Launcelot, of the scandal that would blow about me for ever were you slain in this tower with me by Sir Turquin."

Then once again Sir Launcelot was long silent, for he was at his wits' end. So, presently, the Queen said :

"You speak lightly of death, and so too, may I, for wit you well, Sir Launcelot, that where life is joyless, death comes in no such grim guise. So of death I have no dread, and, as for my good name and the honour of the Round Table, trust thou well that I care for these things no more than for the wind that whistles in the chimney. What are they but images of sand set up for fools to bow them down before ? "

With which words she fell upon her face once more and burst into a great weeping.

Now, it is no more than the truth that, to Sir Launcelot as he stood there pleading with the Queen, these fearful words seemed to fall but little short of the very denial of Christ ; and, on the instant, when she had so spoken, such wrath came upon him that hardly could he keep his countenance. And so was he then quickly resolved how he must deal. So, with no further speech, he broke off a length of the twine that he held in his hand and so moved to where the Queen lay.

"Madam," said he, "full loth am I to deal with you in this ungentele wise, but, so God me save, I see no other means whereby the honour of King Arthur and the Round Table may be saved."

"What would you with me ? " she asked ; and, wit you well, she was in some dread, for his look was stern.

"Madam," said he, "I see no remedy but that I must bind your hands and feet, and so lower you to the ground, maugre your head, for fully resolved am I that here you shall no longer abide to the dishonour of us all."

Therewith he bent over and would have seized her wrists for to bind them together, but she, from below, flung herself upon him like one possessed and so battled with all her strength against him ; and so for a while they wrestled to and fro, speaking no word but breathing hard and striving each

to get the mastery of other. And very sure it is that, in this strife between them, Sir Launcelot—for all that he had torn out the bars from the stonework wherein they were so strongly set—was not the stronger of the two, for by no manner of means could he prevail over the lady Gueneviere for to bind her wrists and, after a while, he tried no more.

Now, all this while, Sir Launcelot's good horse *Grain* stood full soberly by the side of the oak tree to which he had been made fast. And so, as he there stood, he would from time to time neigh gently and smite the ground with his foot for very eagerness to be gone ; and yet hour after hour passed and Sir Launcelot came not.

Then, at the last, when the moon was well below the tower, the black courser raised his head and neighed loudly and right joyfully, for there, coming to him ward through the shadow of the trees, he saw his master leading a fair lady by the hand. So, when he was come to where his horse stood, Sir Launcelot leaped lightly into the saddle and then stooped and lifted up that lady behind him. And so, under his double burden, *Grain* gladly turned his head for home.

CHAPTER IX

How Sir Launcelot and Sir Tristram took Sir Turquin's Castle of Balrig

NOW, as the book saith, on the day next before Pentecost the King—with the Bishop of Canterbury in his company—rode into Camelot from London, and, on the day next following, at four of the clock, Sir Tristram, Sir Meliogrance, Sir Ewen, and two of the Queen's white knights, to wit Sir Meliot de Logris and Sir Bellangere, were made knights of the Round Table. Thus then it was that, at the hour appointed, the King, in his robes of State and with the red and gold dragon upon his helm, came forth from the palace and passed through the streets to St. Stephen's Church, and with him came the Queen and all the knights of the Table Round that were, at that time, there gathered together, to the number of one hundred and eleven, for some there were that were away on this quest or on that, and some there were that were sick.

So, when the Bishop was come to the steps of the altar he turned him about and faced the nave, wherein were seated the one hundred and eleven knights of the Round Table ; and, as he so stood, in the chancel, to his right hand, were King Arthur with Sir Tristram, Sir Meliogrance, and Sir Ewen ; and, to his left hand, were Queen Gueneviere with her twelve white knights ranged in order behind her.

Then, when an acolyte had smitten a bell, those five knights that the King was to honour came forward and knelt upon their knees before the Bishop and there he blessed them, and, when he had so done, they turned them to their left hand and kneeled before the King. Then King Arthur drew his sword and he said to each of those five knights in turn, calling upon their names :

" Wilt thou, in this place and before Almighty God, swear to be true unto me and to the Round Table fellowship so long as there be life in thy body ? "

Then each of those five knights answered and said :

" As Christ is my Saviour, and by my hopes of glory, I will

be true to thee, King Arthur, and to the Round Table fellowship till death."

Then the King smote them each upon the shoulder with his sword, and around the neck of each he hung, by a chain, a cross of gold round the foot of which was coiled a red dragon, for such was at that time the emblem of the Round Table fellowship. So they departed, each to his place, and, when the Bishop had raised his hand, all those knights that were in the nave of the church knelt upon their knees and held on high before them the crossed hilts of their swords, and in like wise did the King and the five new knights that he had made, but the Queen's knights knelt not. Then all those kneeling knights cried together on high the vow of the Round Table fellowship, as the custom was at every Feast of Pentecost, as it came round. And thus they said:

"I swear, by the Holy Order of Knighthood, and by the faith I owe to Christ, never henceforth to do outrage or murder and always to flee treason; also by no means to be cruel but always to give mercy to him that asketh upon pain of forfeiture of my rights for evermore; and always to do ladies, damsels, or gentlewomen succour upon pain of death. Also that I will never take quarrel in a wrong cause or for earthly gain, so help me God and Holy Dome."

So, when they had so said, then they heard Mass, and then the Bishop blessed them once again, and, thereafter, they returned to the palace in like manner as they had come.

So it came about that, some two days after this, Sir Launcelot and Sir Tristram rode forth from Camelot for Caerglewen, for there was it appointed that the lady Isolde was to meet them; and it so was that they rode without esquires, for Gouvernail was in the west country and Wilfran, that was squire to Sir Launcelot, was sick of a distemper, so that he might not ride. Now, it had so been that, at the Court of Camelot, many had talked freely of the great gift which Sir Launcelot had made to Sir Tristram of his Castle of Joyous Garde, and to all men this seemed a right noble gift and a worthy one withal, for there was none there but had great despite unto King Mark because of his many treasons against King Arthur; and, furthermore, it was manifest to all that, if another dwelt in his castle, then must Sir Launcelot needs abide with them a long time at Camelot, to their greater strength and glory. Had the clatter of tongues spread no further abroad there had been no great mischief bred, but, by evil

chance, it so fortune'd that Sir Tristram's man Gouvernail, in riding to Tintagil with a message for Dame Bragwaine, had fallen in with one Sir Bartelot, who was brother to Sir Breuse, and an enemy of all true knights. Now, this fell out in the manner following, that is to say, that at Glastonbury, where Gouvernail had been bidden to rest on his journey, he unhappily lodged in the same hostry where lay this bandit knight, Sir Bartelot, and he, the better to learn tidings of advantage, plied Gouvernail with ale and wine to such good purpose that his tongue wagged more loosely than was profitable, whereby Sir Bartelot soon had knowledge of many things that had better been left unspoken and to which he lent a wide ear ; and to no tale did he hearken more diligently than to this : that, within a short while, Sir Launcelot and Sir Tristram would be riding to Caerglewen from Camelot.

Now, when he heard this, Sir Bartelot was as glad as any man may be, for, as it seemed to him, therein might lie great profit to himself and to those others that banded together with him. And so it came about that, on the day next following that on which he had spoken with Gouvernail, Sir Bartelot sought out his brother, Sir Breuse, and told him of all that he had heard spoken in the hostry at Glastonbury ; and then those two held long counsel each with other, how they had best deal in the matter, for full well wist they that, of their own strength, they could do nothing against knights of such renown as Sir Launcelot and Sir Tristram. So then they bethought them of the giant knight Sir Turquin, in some part because that his Castle of Balrig lay beside the road on which those two knights must needs ride, and also because that, in the country of Surluse, it was held that, for size and strength, Sir Turquin was the equal of any two knights that lived.

Now, this Sir Turquin was twin brother to Sir Carados, whom Sir Launcelot, through misadventure, had slain in the jousts at Camelot ; so when Sir Breuse and Sir Bartelot told him of that which they had in hand, wit you well he was a right joyful man, for he ever looked to slay Sir Launcelot by any means that might be, because of the death of his brother. Howbeit with this that he would do Sir Breuse and Sir Bartelot were by no means in accord, for they looked to ransom rather than to slaying, as being the more profitable. So, when Sir Turquin spoke of a quick death for those two Round Table knights, Sir Breuse said :

"Bethink you well, Sir Turquin, that, in a dead man, there is no profit to any but, for Sir Launcelot alive and a prisoner, there is no ransom that King Arthur would not pay."

"Well," said Sir Turquin, "if I may, I will bind him, but, if the contrary, then will I slay him outright."

Therewith they were all content, and so, after much debate, it was agreed between them that they should wait privily for those two knights in the Forest of Milran, near the Roman shrine, for there the road sloped steeply upward and there too, as well they wist, the evening sun would shine full in the eyes of any that rode from Camelot. And so it came about that, on the fourth day after Pentecost, about the hour of Vespers, Sir Turquin, Sir Breuse, and Sir Bartelot sat their horses behind the shelter of the Roman temple in the Milran Wood, and held their eyes diligently upon the road that led from Camelot. So they sat for two full hours and then they became aware of two knights that rode soberly to them ward, sitting their horses loosely, as men that fear no peril; and, when they were distant but a short bow-draft, then those three bandit knights bore down upon them as hard as they could drive and, taking them unawares, put them backwards out of their saddles clean over their horses' croups. Then it so fell out that Sir Turquin, who rode a horse to match his great size, was borne a full furlong down the hill, or ever he could wheel his horse about. Now turn we to the two brothers, Sir Breuse and Sir Bartelot, who ever rode horses of matchless speed and beauty and who were accounted the two foremost horsemen of the realm. These two, with but little labour, brought their coursers about, and then, as the two fallen knights avoided their horses and rose to their feet, they drove at them anew with their spears and bore them to the ground sorely wounded. Then, as they there lay groaning, up came Sir Turquin and in a loud voice cried out:

"Which of ye twain be Sir Launcelot?"

Whereupon the bigger of the two knights answered and said:

"We be neither of us Sir Lancelot, for I am Sir Gawaine de Lothorn and this is my brother, Sir Gaheris, and we be both nephews to the King."

"And where then," said Sir Turquin, "is that villain knight, Sir Launcelot?"

"As to that I know nothing," said Sir Gawaine, "but that he was at Camelot when we two rode forth."

So then those three bandit knights understood well enough that the King's nephews were worth a goodly ransom; therefore they bound their hands behind their backs and so haled them to Balrig Castle, where they were at first cast into a dungeon; but, on the day next following, the lady Linet, whom Sir Turquin there held captive, brought them forth and lodged them as became their station.

That night, as Sir Turquin and the two brothers, Sir Breuse and Sir Bartelot, sat at dinner, they were at hot debate as to how they should next deal, for Sir Turquin would have had them keep watch upon the Glastonbury road on the evening next following, but the brothers would have cried content, for they held that there was as good profit as any might look for in the taking of the King's two nephews.

"Have we not here, in honest sooth, a goodly enough ransom?" they said. "How then will it profit us to meddle further with these others, for, wit you well, Sir Turquin, that we shall by no means put these other two knights from their horses as lightly as we did the King's two nephews."

"Well," said Sir Turquin, "if, as it would seem, you are in dread of these two Round Table knights, then get you gone in the devil's name and I will essay them alone, for well wot I that there is no knight living but I am able enough for him."

Of these words, that Sir Turquin spoke, Sir Breuse and Sir Bartelot had little joy, for full well wist they that, if they now departed, they would have scant share in the ransom of the King's two nephews.

So those two brothers spoke with one another for a while privily and then Sir Breuse, who was the elder, said:

"Sir Turquin de Surluse, wit you well that my brother and I will make common cause with you in this matter, so as you will truly covenant with us that to each of us three there shall come one-third part of any such ransom as the King may pay."

"Nay, by my head! that will I not," said Sir Turquin, "for, of such ranson as we may recover, one part shall be mine and one part yours, to apportion between you as you will."

"Then," said Sir Breuse, "will we have neither art nor part with you in this matter."

"Do as ye list," said Sir Turquin, "for, trust thou well, Sir Breuse, that, with no help from you, I hold myself to be well enough able for these two knights."

"Sir," said Sir Bartelot, "you might well overcome them,

for your great might is known to all men, but to bind those two and bring them hither is more than any man is able for."

"I will firstly slay Sir Launcelot," said Sir Turquin, "and then, when that villain lieth dead, will I bind Sir Tristram and drag him hither at my horse's tail."

"By the faith of my body! you speak over-large, Sir Turquin," said Sir Breuse, "for wit ye well that these be two passing good knights, and very sure am I that you are not big enough for the two of them, nor, it may well be, for either of them."

So, for a while, they traversed and traced in hot debate, for well Sir Turquin knew that, for all Sir Breuse and Sir Bartelot were of small build, they could use horse and spear with so great skill that few there were that could ever stand before them. So, at the last, those three made a covenant that they would all together assail those two knights and that, of such ransom as the King might proffer, each should have one part.

And so it came about that, on the evening next following the taking of Sir Gawaine and Sir Gaheris, the three bandit knights once more sat their horses behind the shelter of the Roman temple; and, about the same hour, that is to say the hour of Vespers, they espied two horsemen that rode slowly up the hill toward them from the valley below. Of these two, one was singing very gaily and the other rode full soberly with downcast head and a sorrowful mien.

"That one that singeth is Sir Tristram," said Sir Breuse, "and the other must needs be Sir Launcelot."

"Then," said Sir Turquin, "do you and Sir Bartelot deal as best you may against Sir Tristram, while I drive my spear through that villain knight, Sir Launcelot."

Whereupon, with one accord, they set spurs to their horses and drove down the hill upon those two knights that rode toward them. Now the custom with Sir Breuse and Sir Bartelot, in all the adventures which they achieved against those whom they fell upon unawares, was that Sir Breuse should bear down upon the bridle hand and Sir Bartelot, a little behind him, upon the other hand, by which means they ever had the advantage over any with whom they dealt, for, should such a one turn him towards Sir Breuse for his better defence, then was his body laid wholly open to Sir Bartelot's spear, which would smite him so shrewdly upon the side that scarce any knight that lived might stay in his saddle.

In this wise then did these two bandit knights to Sir Tristram, never doubting but that they would prevail with him as they ever had with others, for the steepness of the hill was greatly to their advantage. But therein, as the book saith, they greatly erred, for, such was Sir Tristram's strength, that both their spears broke upon him like straws and yet was he not put from his saddle.

So, when they saw this, those two bandit brothers turned their horses and fled into the forest as fast as they might, for such was ever their custom when the advantage was not with them.

Now turn we to Sir Launcelot and see how it fared with him. When first (as well as he might for the sun that was in his eyes) he became aware of a great knight on a great horse making at him with spear aventred, he wist full well that it would avail him nothing to lay his own spear in rest, for how could any that rode at foot's pace have the advantage against one bearing down a steep hill upon him? So, with his shield, he put aside Sir Turquin's spear and, when that great giant went floundering past him down the hill, lightly he turned his good horse *Grain* and, following after, sent horse and rider to the ground. Then, as Sir Turquin there lay heavily groaning and grunting like some great Behemoth, Sir Launcelot leaped from his horse and placed his sword-point at his throat.

"Now yield you," said he, "or your life is forfeit."

"An you be Sir Launcelot," said Sir Turquin, "I will not yield me but with my life, for full well wot I that you most foully slew my brother, Sir Carados, wherefore, for that deed must one of us two now die."

Then, as they thus spoke, came Sir Tristram to them and cried out:

"Slay him, Launcelot, and spare not, for wit you well that he and those with him have dealt most foully by us and so doth he well merit death."

"Ye speak sooth," said Sir Launcelot, "howbeit, because that by mischance I slew his brother, I would first speak with him some few words." Then he said:

"Sir Turquin, I have somewhat against you, for the which I would slay you out of hand but that, by sad mischance, I slew your brother at Camelot. Wherefore, now, get you to your feet and draw your sword and then keep you from me, as best you may, for here you and I must do battle to the utterance."

Now, at this, Sir Tristram was but ill pleased.

"Sir Launcelot," said he, "you are but a fool, for all men know full well that you slew not Sir Carados foully, but by sad misadventure. Therefore is there now no good cause why you should speak this traitor bandit fair or do battle with him as though he were some noble knight. Therefore, I would say, slay him and make an end."

"Sir Tristram," said he, "I pray you let me deal in this matter as I would, for I have it in mind to show this knight some courtesy because that I slew his brother. Therefore, Sir Turquin, get you your sword and keep you from me as best you may."

"And as for you, Sir Turquin," said Sir Tristram, "take good heed that you deal fairly with this noble knight, for else, so God me bless! will I strike you dead where you stand with my own sword."

"As for that," said the bandit, "I am in no wise dismayed, for wit you well that I hold me to be big enough for any two knights that breathe, whereof I made good proof not long since upon the bodies of two knights of no less hardihood than be ye two."

"And what two knights were they?" Sir Tristram asked of him.

"They were Sir Gawaine and Sir Gaheris, nephews both to the King," said Sir Turquin, "and these two I overthrew and bound not twenty-four hours since."

Now, at these words, those two Round Table knights looked one at the other, as men who hear ill tidings.

"Sir," said Sir Launcelot, "if this be true, then must I needs do battle with you for their deliverance, for these are two most noble knights and very dear unto King Arthur."

"Well," said Sir Turquin, "they lie now, the both of them, in my Castle of Balrig, sore wounded and bound, as will be ye two anon."

"Well," said Sir Tristram, "as for that, it may well be that you speak over-large, so draw your sword and save your breath for that which you have on hand, for I dare say that, anon, you shall have your hands full."

Thus then they made an end of speaking, and then those two knights, Sir Launcelot and Sir Turquin, dressed their shields before them, and then they rushed at one another like two wild boars. So, for half an hour they fought, tracing,

traversing, rasing, and foining hither and thither upon the hill-side like two great harts that fight in the fall of the leaf.

Now this bandit knight Sir Turquin overtopped Sir Launcelot by the breadth of a man's two hands, so that, unless he could be ever on the higher side, he was manifestly at great disadvantage. And so each strove continually to gain the higher side, which was great labour to them both, so that, within a while, their breath came thick and hot, and the sweat ran down from them as water runs from a rock in a rainstorm. Then, at the last, Sir Turquin aimed at Sir Launcelot so mighty a stroke as would have cleft an oak tree in twain and Sir Launcelot, with his shield, put it from him by a breadth of a hair, and then, or Sir Turquin could recover him, he smote him so hard upon the helm that his knees bent beneath him. Thus he stood for a while, all agog, and then Sir Launcelot smote him once again between the helm and the jesserance so that his head hung loosely from his shoulders ; whereupon he fell upon his face and there lay prone.

Therewith Sir Tristram and Sir Launcelot turned him upon his back and he looked up at them and smiled sadly :

" I am sped," said he.

" Sir Turquin," said Sir Launcelot, " it repenteth me somewhat of your death, for you are in truth a passing good knight of your hands. Howbeit, for the evil that you did in the Tower of Vortigern at the May full moon, I hold you to be unworthy to live."

Now, at these words, Sir Turquin opened his eyes and looked upwards.

" The Tower of Vortigern," he said, " have I never yet beheld, and, at the May full moon, I lay with Nacien the hermit, for to be healed of a fever " ; and, having so said, he died.

Then Sir Tristram stooped down and, taking up the giant's sword, measured its weight and length with appraising eyes ; but Sir Launcelot stood there as one bemused, and with eyes in which was a great dread.

" This is a goodly blade," Sir Tristram said, " and, for its size, well balanced to the hand." But to his words Sir Launcelot, I wot, paid no manner of heed, for his thoughts were far away. Whereat Sir Tristram cried out and asked if he were wounded ; but Sir Launcelot shook his head and made answer that he had gotten no wound.

"Then must you needs be sore attaint," said Sir Tristram, "for you are as pale as one that swooneth."

Thereat Sir Launcelot said that he was, in truth, sore attaint. So, when he had drunk some water, he sat him down and rested, while Sir Tristram took Sir Turquin's armour from him.

"Now," said Sir Tristram, "must we make haste and tarry not till we have set free those two noble knights, the king's nephews."

At these words Sir Launcelot rose lightly to his feet.

"Sir," said he, "I pray you show me how we may so do, for it were shame to us for ever were those two noble knights to lie in bonds for yet one night more."

Thereupon Sir Tristram told him all that was in his mind, to wit, that Sir Launcelot should put upon him Sir Turquin's armour and bear his shield upon his shoulder and so ride to the Castle of Balrig on Sir Turquin's horse, so that all men would ween it was Sir Turquin.

"And, when once we two be within the walls," said he, "it will be strange indeed if they find means to put us forth."

To this Sir Launcelot assented readily enough, and so, when they had got Sir Turquin's horse, which fed peaceably at pasture near by, they bound Sir Launcelot's armour upon the back of his black horse *Grain*, and so, with Sir Tristram leading it, those two knights turned and rode their way to the Castle of Balrig. Thither, then, to that great castle, they came within a while, and there, with never a word to any, they rode straight across the drawbridge into the courtelage with no man heeding them, for the darkness was now falling so that all men thought it had been Sir Turquin who rode in. But, when Sir Launcelot and Sir Tristram had quit their horses, then was the ward quickly aware that neither of the knights that stood before them was of Sir Turquin's stature. Then one of them called out on high to the others of the ward:

"Now arm ye, knaves, so quickly as ye may, for here is there some treachery afoot, wherefore must we learn who these knights be and for what good cause they bear our lord's shield, or else must they surely die."

Therewith, upon hearing these words, Sir Launcelot and Sir Tristram drew their swords and stood back to back in the midst of the courtelage, and then Sir Tristram cried out on high:

"Good fellows all, you will learn our names betimes, but at our own pleasure, and, as for your lord, wit ye well that he is dead, slain in fair fight by this noble knight who now stands by me, and most truly do I counsel you, good fellows, that ye meddle not with us two, for so are ye like to fare passing ill."

Howbeit, seeing that these knights were but two and the ward a full score, they took no heed of Sir Tristram's words but with spears in hand assailed them from all sides at once; whereupon, seeing that they must either slay or be slain, those two knights laid about them to such good purpose that, within a while, six of Sir Turquin's men lay dead upon the ground.

Therewith, when they saw this, those others went straightway down upon their knees before Sir Launcelot and Sir Tristram, esteeming them in truth to be demons and not men, for never had they seen men that were mortal deal forth such strokes as had these two.

"My lords," said he that was their leader, "we wot not who ye be nor what names ye bear, but this much we may well say: that ye be the two mightiest knights of your hands that our eyes have yet beheld, and therefore will we serve you to the death, so you will but spare our lives."

"That is well spoken," said Sir Tristram, "and upon this surety will we spare your lives: that you bring forth to us those two noble knights, Sir Gawaine and Sir Gaheris, who lie captive here, and bring them with no hurt nor harm upon their bodies. Therefore make no longer tarrying but bring them hither with all speed."

So they did as they were bid and brought to them the King's two nephews, and then those four knights had great joy each of other, and they all went together within the castle and sat them down, and there they spoke long time of the adventures that had been theirs since they last set forth from Camelot.

That night, at dinner, they were, I wot, a right merry fellowship, and a joyful lady too was the lady Linet, when she learned that Sir Launcelot had slain Sir Turquin, for she hated the bandit knight beyond measure. This lady Linet, as the book saith, was sister to Sir Garhault, who was lord of the country of Surluse, and she was wed to Sir Matto, who was brother to Sir Meliogrance, both being sons of King Brandegore. But now, in these last days, it so was that she had little less despite unto Sir Matto than to Sir Turquin because that he ever feared to do battle with Sir Turquin,

for her sake. Thus it came about that, when Sir Gaheris cast love unto her—for she was very fair to look upon—she was in no wise displeased but placed her hand in his and said that he should be her knight from that time on.

So, when they had spoken of many things, it seemed good to Sir Launcelot and to Sir Tristram that Sir Gaheris should hold the Castle of Balrig for the King from that time on, for, in truth, it was a fair castle and a strong, and, because that it was near to the western road, it might not lightly be left void. So thus they advised the King's nephews; but these two, when they heard what was toward, spoke with one another privily for the space of well-nigh an hour. Then, at the last, Sir Gawaine said:

"My fair lords, Sir Launcelot and Sir Tristram, wit ye well that, in this matter, we may not do as we would, for, when that accursed bandit threw us into bonds, my brother and I were upon a perilous adventure, which we may not readily be quit of, till it is fulfilled. Therefore, my fair lords, as at present my brother Sir Gaheris may not tarry here as you would have him. I pray you, then, my lords, of your goodness, that some of ye abide here till such time as our quest be fulfilled, and thenceforward will Sir Gaheris gladly hold the castle for the King."

Then they asked of him how long would their quest be, and Sir Gawaine said a month.

"Nay, then," said Sir Launcelot, "that may not well be, for I am under a vow to return to Camelot within sixteen days from now."

"And I must to the north forthwith," said Sir Tristram, "for else will King Mark be at my heels with all the strength of Cornwall."

Thus, for a while, they all sat in silence, for none wist rightly what to do or how best to dispose them; only in this were they all of one mind, that by no manner of means must that fair castle be left void. Then, presently, while they still sat in doubt, Sir Gawaine said:

"My lords, on the day when I and my brother rode forth from Camelot it was the common talk of the Court that Sir Lamorak would be riding to South Galis within three days from the time of our setting forth, and, meseemeth, there could no knight better fitted than Sir Lamorak be found to hold this Castle of Balrig for King Arthur, seeing that it lieth midway between Camelot and his own country of South Galis.

My counsel then would be that you, my lord, Sir Launcelot, should lie in wait for Sir Lamorak in the Milran Wood and lead him hither to hold this castle till such time as my brother Sir Gaheris may return. And, if it then please him to yield the castle to Sir Gaheris, well and good, and, if not, then will my brother rest well content that Sir Lamorak should abide here so long as may seem good to him."

Now, when he heard these words, wit you well that Sir Launcelot was a glad man, for there was no knight living that he held in greater liking than Sir Lamorak nor any whom he would more readily see hold this fair castle for King Arthur. So, as to that, were they all agreed and so went to their beds.

Then, on the day next following, at the hour of prime, Sir Gawaine and Sir Gaheris rode forth upon their quest, and with them too went the lady Linet, for they had it in mind to leave her with her brother, Sir Garhault, in his Castle of Roche Dure. When, therefore, these two were departed, Sir Tristram rode into the city of Caerglewen, and there, in the hostry that is by the bridge, he found the lady Isolde and, with her, Dame Bragwaine and Gouvernail, and together those four rode back to Balrig. Then, so soon as they were thither come, Sir Launcelot rode forth at speed for the Milran Wood—for sooner than that he dared not leave the castle, for dread of treachery—and there kept he watch upon the road for the coming of Sir Lamorak. Anon, as he sat his horse in the shade of the trees, he became aware of three knights that made toward him along the road and, of these, he knew one to be Sir Lamorak by his red shield, and the other two he rightly deemed to be his brothers, Sir Tor and Sir Aglovale. Thereupon he rode out from the shade of the trees and stood in their path, at which Sir Lamorak fewtred his spear and bent in his saddle full wickedly, for the sun was in his eyes so that he might not read the device upon Sir Launcelot's shield. But presently, as they drew near to one another, he plainly saw the three azure lions crowned with gold and, at that, he let forth a great shout of joy. So then all those good knights had great joy each of other and together they rode to the Castle of Balrig and there lighted down from their horses and unarmed them.

That night the lady Isolde sat at supper with them, and all those knights looked upon her curiously, for the fame of her beauty was very great ; and, when they had long looked, they all with one accord greatly praised her, for she was small and

dark and withal of a very merry countenance. Then, when they so praised her, the lady Isolde was greatly pleased, and merrily she laughed and said that no lady could but look her fairest when in the presence of the three greatest knights of Christendom, for such, by common consent, were Sir Launcelot, Sir Tristram, and Sir Lamorak. So they were all very merry.

There, then, in the Castle of Balrig, abode those five knights and the lady Isolde for three days and three nights and, on the fourth day, about the hour of undorne, Sir Tristram and his lady rode away northwards. Thus, as they departed, Sir Launcelot stood in the gateway and he took the lady Isolde by the hand, and so said :

“ Fair madam, I pray you of your goodness, when you be come to the land of Sarras, that you seek out my sweet lady Elaine, where she dwelleth in the island of Corbin with her father, and deal with her as gently and as kindly as your goodness may. And I pray you bid her be of good cheer and look steadfastly for my coming so soon as my lord, King Arthur, may set me free. And now, my lady Isolde, fare you well and God speed you and my lord, Sir Tristram.”

Then, when they were departed and were lost to sight beyond the hills, Sir Tor and Sir Aglovale got their horses and set forth for Caerglewen, and thence for South Galis by means of the bridge that the Romans had there built across Severn ; but Sir Lamorak went not with them, for he had agreed with Sir Launcelot to hold the castle for the King. There, too, with Sir Lamorak, abode Sir Launcelot for a sennight, till the day came when, because of his promise to the King, he bade Sir Lamorak farewell and set forth on his journey to Camelot. But, before that he turned his face eastward, he had that to do which might not be left undone, and so he took horse and rode to where Nacien the hermit dwelt by the banks of Severn. When, therefore, he was come to where the hermit’s dwelling stood, he cried out on high and the hermit came forth and stood before him.

“ Sir,” said Sir Launcelot, “ I pray you to tell me of your courtesy when you last had speech with that giant knight, Sir Turquin.”

“ Why, sir,” said the hermit, “ not so long since, for he lay here for many days for to be healed of a fever.”

“ Sir,” said Sir Launcelot, “ tell me, I pray you, at what season it was that he lay here.”

"It was at the May full moon," said the hermit; "that much I know of very surety; for there be certain herbs that have greater virtue at the full moon than at other seasons, and it was with these herbs that I wrought the cure."

Thereupon Sir Launcelot thanked the hermit very courteously and so rode on his way. But the thoughts that were in his mind right gladly would he have eschewed.

CHAPTER X

How the Sons of Lot Slew King Pellinore at Kinkenadan
by the Welsh Sea

NOW turn we to the King's nephews, Sir Gawaine and Sir Gaheris, who, when they had set forth from Balrig, rode into South Galis, and there, in his Castle of Kinkenadan by the Welsh sea, most foully did to death King Pellinore. And this they did because that report had it that King Pellinore had slain their father, Lot, at the Lake of a Hundred Isles (though many there were who said that it had been Sir Balan). This foul deed they did the more readily by reason that none of King Pellinore's sons were with him at Kinkenadan at the time—only Percival, who was but a child; and he, hearing the uproar, fled and hid himself where they might not find him, else had they surely slain him too.

This ill deed, then, being done, Sir Gawaine and Sir Gaheris rode to Queen Morgan le Fay's Castle of Beauregard in South Gore, and there they hid them for the very shame of their deed, for full well they wist that King Arthur's wrath against them would be very bitter, because of the great love in which he ever held King Pellinore.

Now, it so fell out that there was lying at that time in the Castle of Beauregard Queen Morgawse, who was mother to King Lot's sons; and, plainly in her hearing, the two brothers made avaunt of how they had slain King Pellinore and how that they had it in mind to slay Sir Lamorak too and, thereafter, all the other sons of Pellinore. Now, it is not to be denied but that Queen Morgawse was very greatly grieved at that which she heard, for she held Sir Lamorak in high love and affection, and so—with no word to her sons—she took horse and straightway rode off to the Castle of Balrig, and there she warned Sir Lamorak of that which was toward; then, when she had so done, she kept within the walls, for fear of her sons' wrath, at which they thought fit to cry shame upon her, though she was in truth of an age to be Sir Lamorak's mother.

This Sir Lamorak de Galis, as the book saith, was a knight who knew no fear of any that lived, and, therefore, for all he had been warned, yet did he by no means take any heed to the words that Queen Morgawse had spoken, for he trusted to the strength of his hands to save him from any peril that threatened.

And so it came about that, on a day, when he was hunting the deer unarmed in the Milran Woods, those four sons of Lot, Sir Gawaine, Sir Agravaine, Sir Gaheris, and Sir Mordred, all being fully armed, fell upon him and there slew him most foully and unknighly. So, when they had made an end, three of the brothers rode away for better safety to the country of Listinois, but Sir Gaheris hied him to Balrig Castle, and, when he was thither come, he made call for his mother, Queen Morgawse. So she came before him, deeming that he called her for love, or it might be to learn some tidings of Sir Lamorak, and then, without a word, as she there stood before him, he thrust her through the body with a glaive, so that she fell down at his feet and died. And this he did because, as he said, she had shamed them all with Sir Lamorak.

Now the noise of these fearful deeds so stirred the whole fellowship of the Round Table against the sons of Lot, that King Arthur let make a decree that they should be banished the Court for a twelvemonth and a day; and all men said that—had they been other than the King's nephews—their banners would have been torn from the walls of the Round Hall and burned in the market-place by the common executioner, and they themselves would have been banished the fellowship for evermore.

Little, I ween, recked Sir Gaheris at that time of his banishment from the Court, for, after that he had slain his mother, he then shut himself up in the Castle of Balrig and there dwelt at his ease with the lady Linet; but the other three rode as fast as they might to the country of Listinois and there hid them, for, as the book saith, all men held them at that time in abhorrence because of the slaying of King Pellinore and Sir Lamorak.

Then within a while Sir Matto, whose love for the lady Linet had in no wise abated, and who had little dread of Sir Gaheris, came before the walls of Balrig and there called upon Sir Gaheris to come forth and do battle with him for the lady Linet. So Sir Gaheris rode forth, nothing loth, and there

those two fought together for near upon an hour, and, at the end, Sir Gaheris slew Sir Matto with an awk stroke, whereupon the lady Linet, who looked down upon them from the walls, laughed aloud and clapped her hands, for, as the book saith, she loved Sir Gaheris the better of the twain.

CHAPTER XI

How Sir Launcelot Fled from the Queen

ASAD man and a sorrowful, I ween, was Sir Launcelot as he rode through the woods from Caerglewen to Camelot, and, when he was there come, he found the King and Queen in the palace, but of the Round Table knights no great array, for the most part of them had ridden away on divers adventures. Howbeit such as were there made great joy because of Sir Launcelot's overthrow of the giant Turquin, and because of his rescue of the King's two nephews, for, at that time, none had as yet any tidings of King Pellinore's death. A right glad man too, I wot, was King Arthur when he learned that the Castle of Balrig was held for him by so good a knight as Sir Lamorak, for now, as all men truly held, would those riding the western road be freed from great perils.

"My lord, Sir Launcelot," said Sir Ulfius, who was the oldest living of the Round Table knights and one who rode but little abroad by reason of his age, "it pleaseth you to treat lightly of this your battle with that bandit Turquin; howbeit full well wot I that no other knight that lives could have overcome him on foot with sword and shield, for, as men say, he had the strength of ten and hath, or now, reft a man's head from his shoulders with his bare hands." Whereat Sir Launcelot laughed.

"My lord, Sir Ulfius," said he, "wit you well that the biggest giant upon earth, when he is sore winded, is no more to be dreaded than a child unborn."

"Well," said Sir Ulfius, "that is not to be denied, but no man is sore winded when first he engageth in battle, and only a knight of great hardihood might endure that giant's strokes till his breath failed him."

And thus, while all those others praised Sir Launcelot as much as they might, yet spoke the Queen no word till they sat that night at dinner, and then she said:

"So, my lord, Sir Launcelot, thou hast rid me of mine ancient enemy, Sir Turquin, for the which I give thee hearty

thanks, for now, as it would seem, may I ride on hawking in the Warwell Woods without peril."

"In good sooth, madam," said Sir Launcelot, "the peril is in no great measure abated by that which I have done, for Sir Turquin, before he died, swore to me upon his Saviour that never, or that time, had he so much as seen Vortigern's Tower."

"He lied," she cried hotly; "so base a knight would deem it no shame to swear falsely."

"He lied not, lady Gueneviere," said he, "for I had it from the mouth of the hermit Nacien that, at the May full moon, Sir Turquin lay with him for a sennight to be healed of a fever."

Thereat, for a while, the Queen held silence and cast her eyes downward; but rosy red, I wot, were her cheeks, for shame was in her heart.

"Sir," she said, "for this do you hate me past remedy?"

"I hate you not at all, madam," said he, "for that may no man do who beareth life; but myself I hate out of all measure."

"Alas!" said she, "that so noble a knight should speak such words; for, wit you well, Sir Launcelot, that poor women, in their weakness, are driven to creep to their ends by crooked means, where men, in their rude strength, march boldly in with drawn swords; and, come what may, we are lashed with foul tongues for that which, in you, is held no villainy but rather the contrary."

"God knoweth, madam," said Sir Launcelot, "that I make no such avaunt, for very sure am I that villainy is villainy whosoever be the causer thereof; and, in this matter, doubt not, madam, but that I hold myself to be the basest of living men and worthy to be branded with letters of shame, as men brand malefactors."

"Alas!" said she, once more, "you scourge yourself over-much Sir Launcelot. What profiteth it to make swollen rivers out of gutter-drips? Furthermore, as all men know, it is but the common cry concerning poor women that our shame is your glory. Do men cry shame on Sir Gawaine or on Sir Tristram? No, nor women either, as well you wot. But do we poor women but stretch the chains of our light-of-love lords by the width of a blade of grass, and we are straight haled to the stake with all the world pointing hard fingers at us."

"Madam," said Sir Launcelot, "there are heavier burdens to be borne than the scorn of thoughtless fools."

"If so," she said, "I know them not."

"Then," said he, "you know not self-scorn nor self-hatred."

"But, sir," said she, "these things but come from within and therefore may be put aside at pleasure."

"Madam," said he, "there may well be some who can so put them aside, but with me it is far otherwise, for they cling to me by day and night as limpets cling to the rocks, and in right doleful fashion, so that, while men wave slaveling hands at me and cry worship of my sword and spear, I know myself full well to be as base a thing as any worm that crawls among the slime for carrion crows and starlings to peck at."

"Sir Launcelot," said the Queen, "there is an old saying among us which runs: 'He is no thief who takes what no man needs'; and, by my faith! I hold this to be a wise saying and a true."

"But how comes it then," said he, "that a man should so closely guard that of which he hath no need?"

"Alas!" said she, "therein lies the cruelty."

"Cruelty indeed," said he, "if truly he doth hold you of no account; but that passeth all belief."

"Sir Launcelot," said she, "it is but little that you know of my life, and mebesemeth that, so you knew more, then might you judge me less harshly. I beseech you, therefore, of your courtesy, that you come with me right now into the garden, for the night is warm and the flowers have no ears to hear, and there shall you learn how cherished a blossom is, and ever has been, the Queen of this fair realm of Britain."

Therewith she arose and led the way out into the garden and Sir Launcelot followed her, and then those two sat them down upon one of the stone seats that faced across the valley. So, for a while, they sat and said no word, for their thoughts were heavy within them. Then, at the last, the Queen spoke, slowly and as one who hath little love for that which she saith.

"It was after the battle of Bedegraine," she said, "that I first set eyes upon King Arthur, for my father, Leodogrance, had brought me thither—being but sixteen years of age at the time—in the hope, as I suppose, that Arthur's eye would rest upon me with favour, for I was accounted fair; but it fell out otherwise, for, at that time, he held in high love the

lady Lianors, who was daughter to Sir Darras. So, seeing that there was no profit in further tarrying, we made back to Cameliard. Then, two years after, Merlin must needs come to Cameliard with the tale that, since he first saw me, the King had loved me more than any that lived, and so would make me his Queen. At this my father made great joy, nor did I hide my content for, wit you well, Sir Launcelot, it pleased me not a little to think that—though at Bedegraine he had said no word—yet had Arthur ever held me in love these two years past. So the Round Table, which my father had from Uther Pendragon, and which was to be my marriage-portion, was bestowed in great wagons and so sent to Camelot, and I myself rode thither with Merlin and with a hundred knights attending me, for so would my father have it. Very gracious to me was King Arthur and goodly robes and jewels he gave me, but of love I saw but little sign, and, all too soon, I learned that the tale of his love was but Merlin's, and that Merlin it was who had counselled him to wed me, because of my father's strength in knights and arms; for Arthur himself, as at that time, had but little strength left by reason of his long wars with the Saxons. Was there comfort in this for a young maid's heart? Was I a leper that he should so turn from me? A leper, in good sooth, I wot well that I am not, for that poor fool, Sir Meliogrance, is like to go mad for love of me, and Sir Sagramor is but little behind him in his sighs and complaints; but of them I take no more heed than does silver Itchen of the dragon-flies that flit upon its waters, for, wit you well, Sir Launcelot, that, for all the King's cold eye, I am not lightly to be won, nor, or this, hath any whisper of scandal assailed my fair name; for, as Christ be my Saviour, Sir Launcelot, I have loved no man but thee all the days of my life, and, hate me as thou wilt for my craft, that must be my warrant for all."

So, when she had made an end of speaking, she wept long and silently, and Sir Launcelot, for the sorrow that was in him, said no word but looked straight before him across the valley.

"Well?" she said, at length.

"Lady Gueneviere," said Sir Launcelot, "mebeseemeth that, for all this that thou hast told me, there is no ready remedy; therefore were it best that we speak thereof no more, for even speech savours in some part of treason to King Arthur."

"Well then, an it so please you, we will speak thereof no more," she said, "but for that which I have said I make no sorrow, for now, at the least, you know."

"Would to God I knew not," he said.

"Is it then such pain to be loved of me?" said the Queen.

Now at this Sir Launcelot was hard put to it to say that which he would, for, in the nice choosing of words, he had but little skill.

"Madam," said he, at the last, "all love which warreth with honour is pain."

"And life without love is pain," she said, "so that the riddle reads, in which of the two lieth the greater pain?"

Once again Sir Launcelot held silence, for no answer came to his tongue. Then, within a while, the Queen spoke again.

"And what of the days to come?" she said. "Wilt thou ever shun me, or wilt thou be my knight as heretofore?"

"Right gladly will I be thy knight," said he, "so long as strength is mine; and I will uphold thy name against all the world, and do battle against all the world in any cause that may be thine, because that thou art the Queen of my liege lord, King Arthur."

"And because that I am Gueneviere, a woman with a fond heart, what wilt thou do?" she said. "Shun me? Hate me? Fling me aside?"

"As for that," he said, "all that may be done with honour that will I do."

"Oh! this never-ending honour!" she cried. "How I weary of it! Because of this one word, the true interpretation of which no man rightly knoweth, men break poor women's hearts and fling them into the kennel to die. In this is no dishonour! Let us eat out our hearts in lonely misery. What recks it, so long as men can pin this empty word upon their breasts and puff themselves out with righteous pride?"

"But the gain of one woman is ever the loss of another," said he, "for, forget it not, lady Gueneviere, that there liveth in the country of Sarras a very fair lady whom I hold in close love, as she holdeth me, and a shameful thing I would deem it were she to eat out her heart in lonely misery, while I forsooth play the traitor elsewhere."

"Meseemeth," said she, "that, with the length of the land between you, she would be none the lonelier because that other poor women are less lonely."

"There, madam," said he, "I am very sure that you reason falsely."

"And very sure am I that I do not," she said. "To what end should two women suffer, where there is no need that two should suffer? You are cruel beyond measure, Sir Launcelot, and without any need therefor, and, to this needless cruelty, it pleaseth you to give the name of honour."

"I so name it," said he, "for it is thus that I see honour."

"Then," said she, "you see askew, and woundily askew. A bird starves at Camelot; a bird starves in Sarras. A knight stands by with bread in either hand, but he must not feed the bird that starves at Camelot because forsooth the bird in Sarras likewise starves. So both birds starve and die, and the loaf grows stale and is wasted, and none gaineth in anything only the knight, who swells with pride because two poor birds starve! Was ever such foolishness?"

For a while neither spoke, and then, on a sudden, the Queen said:

"Sir Launcelot, meseemeth it were well that this lady of thine should come to Camelot, and so shall she starve the less."

"And would you have her starve the less?" he asked.

"I would have one of us starve the less," said the Queen, "and I would fain see this lady Elaine, whether she be in truth fairer than I, or not."

"And what, madam," said he, "should she prove the fairer?"

"Then——" said she; but with her lips, at that time, she said no more. Howbeit, there was that in her eyes which—had Sir Launcelot seen it—would have made him fear very greatly for his lady; but quickly that look passed and, in its place, came a look of great sadness. "If she prove the fairer," said she, "then is there no remedy but that I should starve continually, even as I now starve."

Wherewith she fell to weeping and so drooped weeping upon Sir Launcelot's shoulder.

Now, it is not to be denied that Sir Launcelot was sorrowful beyond measure that the lady Gueneviere should thus make such heavy dole, and so he sought to comfort her with such words as he might find, nor did he put her away from his shoulder on which she leaned; but, anon, she so clung to him and her tears changed to smiles so sweet and hard to be encountered, that Sir Launcelot, on a sudden, leaped to his

feet and, bursting from her, ran as hard as he might into the palace. Thereupon the lady Gueneviere smiled no more, but rose to her feet, and then she too made for the palace, but with steps that faltered beneath her, as falter the steps of a hart that has been stricken by an arrow.

CHAPTER XII

How the Country of Cameliard was all but Lost to
King Arthur

ABOUT this time there came to Camelot word of the death of King Pellinore and of Sir Lamorak, and never did worse tidings than these come to any Court. As for King Arthur, his wrath was such that, had his two nephews been there at that time, he would beyond doubt have slain them. Then, following close upon that—so true is it that ill-tidings never come alone, but ever in flocks like foul birds—came the bruit that King Leodogrance had fallen sick unto death. Thereupon the lady Gueneviere made best haste for Cameliard, but, or ever she could come that length, her father had died. At this, there arose, in the kingdom of Cameliard, so great an uproar as no man might readily see the end of, for thus it ever was in those days when any king died, for many there were who sought the kingdom. But so it was that, while some clamoured for this lord to rule them, and others for that, the greater part inclined unto Sir Hildebrand, who was nephew to Leodogrance; but, as evil chance had it, he was, at the time, far away to the south in the country of Sessoins; and so it fell out that, while men looked this way and that for one to rule them, the kingdom was seized upon by one Sir Gambrail, whom all men knew for the son of a yeoman's wife, but who made claim that his father had been King Leodogrance. Now, this Sir Gambrail was a passing big knight and a strong, and any who withsaid him he slew without mercy, so that, from very fear, men bent the knee to him and called him lord.

So it came about that, with many following him, Sir Gambrail shut himself up in the Castle of Pristoun, which is on the Rippling River, and from thence laid waste the country far and wide and oppressed all men, high and low. Whereupon the lady Gueneviere, fearing to lose the whole kingdom of Cameliard, betook her as fast as she might to her father's Castle of Mameceaster and there set up her staff; and thither, too, within a while, there flocked to her all such as held her

in reverence and love for the sake of King Leodogrance. Howbeit, they that followed Sir Gambrail were the greater in numbers and strength, so that the kingdom was like to fall atwain, and so it was that Queen Gueneviere made send a light pricker to the country of Sessoins for to speed back, by all the means he might, her cousin, Sir Hildebrand.

Now there was a certain knight named Sir Dornar, who was younger brother to Sir Lamorak, and he was a passing good knight of his hands, so that many held him to be as good a knight as Sir Lamorak and some, who spoke lightly and without weighing this and the contrary, named him the equal of Sir Launcelot. This knight now dwelt with his mother, Queen Naula, in the Castle of Lianours, which is in Listinois, and to the lady Gueneviere it seemed that here, close at hand, was a strong and noble knight who might, by the strength of his hands, deliver her from Sir Gambrail before the coming of Sir Hildebrand, for it was many days' journey to the country of Sessoins. Therewith she sent to the Castle of Lianours praying Sir Dornar of his knighthood to come and do battle for her with Sir Gambrail, and he, being of the sons of Pellinore, who knew no fear, came swiftly at her bidding.

So, on a day, Sir Dornar rode up to the Castle of Mameceaster and over the drawbridge and then he disarmed him and knelt before the Queen.

"Madam," said he, "as you have required me, so am I now come hither to do battle for you against this upstart fellow Gambrail; and this will I do right willingly upon a covenant, which is this: that, if I prevail against him and slay him, then shall this kingdom of Cameliard be mine to hold evermore for King Arthur so long as I live; for, trust thou well, lady Gueneviere, that, but for this, there were little profit to me in this adventure."

Now, when he had so said, it is not to be denied but that the Queen had some misease, for to covenant with him in this wise had been very far from her thoughts. Howbeit she saw no ready remedy therefrom, for many long days must needs pass before Sir Hildebrand could come, and, even were he there, she knew him well for a weakling who could make but scant headway against so big a knight as Sir Gambrail. So, when she had taken counsel with those of her father's knights who were there, at the last she agreed to all his asking.

Therewith they appointed a day, and it was agreed among them all that, whoso prevailed on that day—whether it were

Sir Dornar or whether it were Sir Gambrail—should, from that time on, rule the kingdom of Cameliard.

So, on a day, these two knights came together before a great multitude of people, and, at their meeting, Sir Gambrail unhorsed Sir Dornar and then, avoiding his horse, lashed at him so fiercely with his sword that he beat him down to his knees and then cleft him to the brain through his helm. Thereat all those that held to King Arthur made great sorrow that so noble a knight should be thus unmannerly slain by one who was base-born, and the Queen, in great heaviness of mind, made back to Camelot, for she was at her wits' end.

So, when she was there come, she said before King Arthur and Sir Launcelot: "This Sir Gambrail is, by the report of all men, as strong a knight as ever wore harness, and very sure am I that there is none other in all the land that can put him to the worse, but only you, my lord, Sir Launcelot, or, it might be, Sir Tristram; and, seeing that he is far away in a distant land, there remaineth none other than you. Therefore, my lord, Sir Launcelot, I require you, as ye be a true knight and as you have made promise to me aforetime, that you take you forthwith to the country of Cameliard and there, for the honour of our knighthood, put this upstart to the rebuke, for else are we all shamed for evermore."

"Lady Gueneviere and my liege lord, King Arthur," said Sir Launcelot, "to all that the Queen hath said I have paid good heed, and truly it repenteth me of the loss of that fair country and of the death of that noble knight, Sir Dornar. Howbeit, my lady Gueneviere, of that which you would have me do you must, as at this time, hold me excused, for, as I understand the matter, this battle with Sir Dornar was made upon a covenant that he who slew the other should hold the kingdom of Cameliard henceforth, and from that covenant we may by no means depart, but with great dishonour." At which the Queen looked sourly, but King Arthur upheld Sir Launcelot, though, as God knoweth, making but heavy cheer over the losing of so great a part of his realm.

However, it so fell out, by the great mercy of God, that, within a while of his overthrow of Sir Dornar, so puffed up with pride was Sir Gambrail that he overran the bounds of Cameliard and laid waste with fire and sword the country of Listinois. Whereupon the King sent for Sir Launcelot and said:

"What make ye now of this, Sir Launcelot? For me-

seemeth this villain will push me from my very throne, an we move not in the matter, for the bruit has it that he gathers strength daily."

"Sir," said Sir Launcelot, "an I might so counsel you, it would be in this wise. Meseemeth you are in some part weakened, these many days past, by reason of the despite in which some of the noblest knights in the land hold your nephews, whereby many fall away from you daily and others hold them aloof from the Round Table fellowship; and it hath long been in my mind that by no means could I better serve you, my lord, King Arthur, than were I to bring to this realm of Logris some of my own kinsmen from the kingdom of Guienne, who, as I wot full well, would serve you right faithfully and honourably. I would pray you, therefore, that you now suffer me to sail hence to my own country, and thence will I return, so quickly as a ship may sail, with some of my blood, who will serve you so long as life be theirs, and who will help to bring this realm to better subjection. Then, thereafter, with these in our company, can we the more readily bring this fellow Gambrail to judgment and deliver the kingdom of Cameliard from his malice."

So spake Sir Launcelot and, for two days and a night, King Arthur dwelt continually on his words and, in the end, he said :

"Sir Launcelot, like as you have counselled me, even so will I do, for, in good sooth, the follies of my nephews have weakened me out of all measure, and full well wot I that, but for such help as you may bring, I am without the strength to put this upstart to the rebuke or to push him from the advantage that he hath. So, I pray you, Sir Launcelot, do as you best may in this matter, for from no other that liveth can I look for help unless it be King Hoël of Bretagne, and of him I have no very present surety."

So Sir Launcelot sailed from Dover, and a right glad man, I wot, was he to put the width of the seas betwixt him and the perils that threatened him at Camelot; and, whether for this cause, or because of the contrary winds that raged throughout that season, no man can say with surety, but certain it is that twelve good months had passed before he landed once again, about the time of Michaelmas, at Sandwich. With him, for to help King Arthur, there then came across the seas Sir Launcelot's two brothers, Sir Lionel and Sir Hector, and his three cousins, Sir Bors, Sir Blamor, and

Sir Bleboris, with their squires and men-at-arms, to the number of a thousand or thereby. So, within a while, they all came to London, and there they rested a while, for, at that time, the King and all the Court were far away at Kinkenadan, in the country of South Galis. Only Queen Gueneviere was at Camelot, for she had no mind to go with the others to South Galis.

CHAPTER XIII

How Sir Gareth Won the Degree at the Isle of Avilion

NOW, as the book saith, the passing of the Court to South Galis came about in this wise. At Michaelmas following the parting of Sir Launcelot—he being still upon the high seas—King Arthur let cry that, at that season, a great tourney would be held at Kinkenadan upon the Welsh sea, which was the castle of Sir Tor, the son of King Pellinore ; and this he did of good intent, for the better strengthening of the kingdom of South Galis, for, as the book saith, there were many who held Sir Tor in disdain because that his mother had been a milkmaid, and, among these, none was there whose malice was hotter than Queen Naula, who coveted the kingdom for Sir Aglovale, her son—Sir Lamorak and Sir Dornar being now dead. So, after that King Pellinore had been done to death, Queen Naula turned her back upon Kinkenadan and betook her with her three sons, Sir Aglovale, Sir Dornar, and Sir Percival, to Listinois, where she dwelt thenceforth in the Castle of Lianours. Then, after that Sir Dornar had met his death at the hands of Sir Gambrail, she yet dwelt continually at the Castle of Lianours, but never did her malice rest but that, by any means that were hers, she might mischief Sir Tor by means of ill reports, and by sowing discord and treachery among his following.

Now this Sir Tor, for all that his mother had been a milkmaid, was a full noble and goodly knight, and it is not to be denied that King Arthur held him in great liking ; and, because of this, and for the better strengthening of Sir Tor's rule in South Galis, it pleased the King that the Michaelmas tourney should be held for that year at Kinkenadan. Thus it came about that, upon a day, as King Arthur and his knights sat in the hall of the Castle of Kinkenadan, there came in two men well beseen and richly, and upon their shoulders there leaned the goodliest young man that ever they saw, and he was long and large and broad in the shoulders and well-visaged. And, as they came to the high daïs, he raised himself up straight and said :

"King Arthur, God you bless and all your fair fellowship. I am come hither to ask of you three gifts, and they shall not be unreasonably asked but that ye may worshipfully and honourably grant them, and to you no great loss nor hurt."

Thereupon King Arthur said: "Fair sir, ask, and so it be not unreasonable, ye shall have your asking."

"This then," said he, "is my petition: that ye give me meat and drink for a twelvemonth and, when a twelvemonth is past, at that time I will ask mine other two gifts."

"My fair son," said King Arthur, "ask better, I counsel thee; for this is but a simple asking, and my heart goeth out to thee greatly that thou art come of men of worship."

"Sir," said he, "be that as it may, I will ask that I will ask."

Therewith, when he would say no more, the King charged Sir Kay, the seneschal, that he should give this young man meat and drink of the best, and all manner of finding as though he were a lord's son.

"There is little need," said Sir Kay, "to do such cost upon him, for I dare undertake he is a villain born, for, an he had come of gentlemen, he would have asked of you horse and armour, but, such as he is, so he asketh. And, since he hath no name, I shall give him a name that shall be Beaumains, and into the kitchen I shall bring him, and there shall he have fat brose; so that, by the twelvemonth, he shall be fat as any pork hog."

Then many of the knights that were there in the hall were wrath with Sir Kay and bade him bear in mind how that he had, in mockery, named Sir Brennor "*La Côte mal taille*" when first he came to Court, and yet that youth had proved himself a full noble knight.

"As for that," said Sir Kay, "this one shall never prove such, for Sir Brennor desired ever worship, and this one desireth no more than meat and drink."

So thus this Beaumains was put into the kitchen, and there he lay nightly, as the boys of the kitchen did. And so he endured all that twelvemonth and never displeased man nor child, but always he was meek and mild.

Then, on a day, when the twelvemonth was past, there came to Caerleon upon Usk, where the Court then was, the lady Linet from her Castle of Balrig, where she dwelt with Sir Gaheris, with a certain petition to the King (for Sir Gaheris

might not come because that his banishment was not yet past).

"Sir," she said, "my sister, the lady Lenora, is besieged of a tyrant in her castle, which is named the Castle Perilous and standeth in the Isle of Avilion, and, because here are called the noblest knights of the world, I come to you to pray you of succour."

"How is this tyrant named?" he asked.

"Sir," she said, "he is named Sir Ironside."

"I know him not," said the King.

"I know him well," said Sir Pelleas, "and he is one of the most perilous knights of the world, and from him I once escaped full hard with my life."

Thus, as they all there sat, came Beaumains into the hall and, standing before them all, said: "Sir King, God thank you, I have been these twelvemonths past in your kitchen, and now will I ask my two gifts that be behind, and they be these: first that you will let me have this adventure of Sir Ironside and, secondly, that you will make me knight."

"These two gifts will I grant thee," said the King.

"Fie on thee!" said the lady Linet to King Arthur; "shall I have none but is thy kitchen page?"

"Fear not," said the King, "for I warrant me that he shall prove full worthy of this adventure."

So he made him knight, and then they brought him a horse and armour, and, when he had put the armour on him, Sir Beaumains rode forth with the lady Linet; and all that were there wondered at the nobility that was in him.

Now, at all this that had befallen, the lady Linet was passing wrath, for she held it to be shame that so mean a knight—as she supposed—had been granted her for this adventure, and so, because of the disdain that was in her, she had Sir Beaumains in continual mockery.

"What dost thou here?" she said. "Thou stinkest all of the kitchen; thy clothes be foul of the grease and tallow that thou gainedst in the kitchen. What art thou but a lubber and a turner of spits and a ladle-washer?"

"Fair damsel," said he, "say of me what ye will, I will not go from you whatsoever ye say, for I have undertaken to King Arthur for to achieve your adventure, and so shall I finish it to the end or I shall die therefor."

Howbeit, for all his meekness, she none the less mocked and reviled him without cease, with all that her tongue could

devise, but, to all her ill words, he ever gave back but gentleness and courtesy. So they rode for many a day till they came to an hermitage that stood hard by the Castle Perilous ; and there they lay all that night, and, on the morn, they heard Mass and brake their fast. After this they took their horses and rode through a fair forest till they came to a plain, where were many pavilions and tents and a fair castle, and there among the pavilions and tents was much smoke and great noise. And when they came near to the siege, Sir Beaumains espied, as he rode, how that there hung upon trees full goodly knights, by the neck, to a great number.

"What meaneth this ?" he asked.

"Sir," said she, "all these knights came hither to this siege to rescue my sister, the lady Lenora, and all of them hath Sir Ironside put to death, and in the same wise will he serve you."

"Truly," said he, "it is marvel that he endureth so long and that none of the noble knights of my lord, King Arthur, have not dealt with him."

Then they espied a great horn that hung upon a sycamore tree and, therewith, Sir Beaumains spurred his horse to the tree and so blew the horn eagerly, that all the castle rang thereof. With that there leapt out knights, out of their tents and pavilions, and they within the castle looked over the walls and out of windows, and amongst these that so looked out was the lady Lenora ; and so it was that Sir Beaumains looked up to the window where she was with a glad countenance, for to him she seemed the fairest lady in all the world. Then Sir Ironside, when he heard the sound of the horn, rode up fully armed and called to Sir Beaumains.

"Leave, Sir Knight, thy looking and behold me, I counsel thee ; for I warn thee well that this lady that thou beholdest is my lady, and for her have I done many strong battles."

"As for that," said Sir Beaumains, "I understand well that she loveth thee not ; and gladly would she be quit of thee ; and shame to thee it is, therefore, that thou shouldst so encompass a lady who hath no will for thee."

"Make thee ready," said Sir Ironside, "and talk no longer with me."

So then Sir Beaumains dressed his shield before him and these two knights departed from one another and then, turning, came together like thunder, and either smote other in the midst of his shield and so passed on unshaken ; then,

once again turning, they hurtled together so mightily that each fell to the ground and there lay a great while, so that all in the castle weened their necks had been broken. Then, within a while, they both leapt to their feet and drew their swords, and then they lashed at one another so fiercely that all who beheld them marvelled. Thus they fought for well-nigh an hour, till at last they lacked wind both, and so they stood wagging and scattering, panting, blowing, and bleeding, that all who beheld them, for the most part, wept for pity. And thus, by assent of them both, either granted other to rest, and so they sat them down upon two mole-hills, and either of them unlaced his helm and took the cold wind. And, after a while, Sir Beaumains was refreshed and so he said to Sir Ironside :

"Make thee ready now and we will do battle to the uttermost."

"I will well," said he ; and so they laced up their helms and stepped together and fought freshly for a long while, and, at the last, Sir Beaumains smote the sword out of Sir Ironside's hand and then smote him on the helm so that he fell to the earth and yielded him. Then Sir Beaumains unlaced his helm for to have slain him, whereupon all they that stood by fell upon their knees and prayed him of his mercy that he would save his life.

"Fair lords," said Sir Beaumains, "wit you well that I am full loth to slay this knight, who is as good a knight as any may meet with ; nevertheless he hath done passing ill and shamefully, and that is not to be denied. Howbeit, I will spare him upon this covenant, that he go within the castle and yield him there to the lady Lenora, and, if she will that I forgive him, I will well, so as he make amends to her for all the trespass that he hath done unto her and her lands."

And, even as he bade him, so Sir Ironside did, and the lady Lenora received him upon sufficient surety, so all her hurts were well restored. Then, thereafter, they each abode in their tents ten days till that they were healed of their wounds and, at the end of that time, Sir Beaumains commanded that Sir Ironside should depart unto Kinkenadan and there yield him unto King Arthur. All this Sir Ironside did, and when he was thus come he told the King openly how he had been overcome, and by whom, and also he told all the battle from the beginning unto the ending, and also that never, or that, had he been overcome of any knight for a full score years.

"Mercy!" said King Arthur, "I marvel greatly of what blood this Sir Beaumains be come, for he is a full noble knight."

Now turn we shortly to Sir Beaumains, who desired greatly of the lady Linet that he might see her sister.

"Sir," she said, "I would fain ye saw her, and therefore, by my counsel, ye shall make no longer tarrying." Thereupon he armed him and took his horse and his spear, and rode straight unto the castle. But, when he came to the gate, he found there many men armed, who, when they saw him, pulled up the drawbridge and drew the port close. Then marvelled he why they would not suffer him to enter. And then he looked up to a window and there he saw the lady Lenora, who said on high:

"Go thy way, Sir Beaumains, for trust thou well that thou shalt have no love of me until such time as I know thy name and lineage."

Now, of these words of hers he had but scant joy for, wit you well, he had very great love unto her, and so he said:

"Fair lady, so you would have my name and lineage, I may no longer withhold it from you; therefore know you that I am Sir Gareth, son of Lot, King of the Picts, and brother unto Sir Gawaine, Sir Agravaine, Sir Gaheris, and Sir Mordred; and I am the youngest of them all."

So, when the lady Lenora heard this she was greatly rejoiced, and she said to her brother, Sir Gringemour:

"Right glad am I that he cometh of such noble lineage, and now therefore bid them, I pray you, let down the drawbridge that he may come hither and have speech with me."

So thus they did, and Sir Gareth entered in and beheld the lady Lenora, and to him she seemed fairer than any other lady that lived, and to her he seemed the goodliest knight on earth and the best. So they made great joy each of other, and, when they had supped, they plighted troth each to other to love and never to fail while their life lasted.

But, as the book saith, while these two so did, in the Castle Perilous, ever King Arthur sought to know truly concerning Sir Beaumains, what was his true name and lineage, and, while he so wondered, there came to him Sir Gawaine—for the days of his exile were now fulfilled—and he counselled him that he should send to the lady Lenora, and pray her to come to the Court in all the haste that she might; "And thus," said he, "you will surely learn of her who he is."

"This is well said of you," said the King. So then goodly letters were made, and the messenger set forth and journeyed day and night until he was come to the Castle Perilous. And, when the lady Lenora understood the message, she went to Sir Gareth and said: "Now advise me what shall I say, and in what manner I shall rule me."

"My lady and my love," said Sir Gareth, "I pray you in no manner of wise to let known who or where I am. But this I would that ye said, when the King question you, that, an it so like his good grace, ye will make cry a tourney upon the Isle of Avilion, and that, what knight soever there proveth him best, he shall wed you and all your lands. And if so be that he be a wedded man, then shall his lady have a coronal of gold, beset with stones of virtue, and a white jèr-falcon."

So the lady Lenora departed and rode to Caerleon upon Usk, where the Court then was, and said to King Arthur all as Sir Gareth had advised her. And the King was well content and so told her, and with that she departed and came back to her castle.

There then, when the appointed time drew nigh, was there made great array for the tourney, which was appointed to be held in the Isle of Avilion, and hither came all manner of victual by land and water, and there too were tents and pavilions without number and all manner of minstrelsy that might be found; and, two days or the feast, came King Arthur's harbingers for to harbour him and his knights.

So, at length, came the day of the tourney and, thereon, Sir Gringemour gave to Sir Beaumains a fair bay courser, that was a passing good horse; also he gave him good armour and sure, and a noble sword that sometime Sir Gringemour's father won upon an heathen tyrant.

So, upon Assumption Day, when Mass and Matins were done, then were heralds with trumpets commanded to blow to the field. Then began that tourney in the manner following, for, first, Sir Epinogris encountered with Sir Sagramor and either of them brake their spears to their hands. Then came Sir Palomides and encountered with Sir Gawaine, and either of them smote other so hard that both the good knights and their horses fell to the earth. Then Sir Safere encountered with Sir Agravaine and smote him down, and Sir Segwarides smote down Sir Gaheris, and Sir Ewen smote down Sir Malgrin. Thereafter Sir Tor smote down Sir Gremmor. Next after this Sir Arnold and Sir Gauter encountered with

Sir Branadil and Sir Kay, and these four knights encountered mightily and brake their spears to their hands. Thereafter Sir Petipase of Winchelsea overthrew Sir Saduk. Then rode in Sir Gareth and, as quickly as might be, he smote down Sir Safere, Sir Segwarides, Sir Lucan, Sir Tor, Sir Bedivere, Sir Peripase, and his own brother, that was Sir Gawaine.

Thereupon all men cried out that the knight with the white and green shield had gained the degree, and so came he and stood before the King.

"Fair knight," said the King, "I marvel greatly what knight you be, for truly have you shown yourself this day as worthy of worship as any knight that lives, if it be not Sir Launcelot du Lac or Sir Tristram. Therefore, by common cry, is the degree yours, and yours is it also to wed the lady Lenora, an you so will; but, seeing that it is not fitting that a damsel should plight her troth to a nameless knight, I hereby require you, of your knighthood, to make known to me your name."

With that he told King Arthur, and all those that were there gathered together, how that he was Sir Gareth, the youngest of King Lot's sons; and, when the King heard this, he was greatly rejoiced and very warmly did he embrace Sir Gareth, his nephew. Then the King asked him of the lady Lenora, whether he would have her to wife.

"My lord," said he, "wit you well that I love her above all ladies living."

"Now, fair lady," said King Arthur, "what say ye."

"Most noble King," she said, "wit you well that my lord, Sir Gareth, is dearer to me, to have and hold as my husband, than any king or prince that is christened; and, if I may not have him, I promise you I will never have none; for he is my first love and he shall be the last."

"What," said King Arthur, "is the wind in that door? Then, wit you well, my lady Lenora, that I would not for the stint of my Crown to be causer to withdraw your two hearts; and ye cannot love so well but I shall rather increase it than distress it. Also ye shall have my love and my lordship in the uttermost wise that may lie in my power."

Then was there made provision for the day of the marriage, and, by the King's advice, it was provided that it should be at the feast of Michaelmas following, at Kinkenadan by the seaside. And so was it cried in all the places in the realm.

So it drew fast to Michaelmas, and thither, at that time,

came the lady Lenora with her brother, Sir Gringemour, and the lady Linet ; and upon Michaelmas Day the Bishop of Canterbury made the wedding between them with great solemnity. On the same day, King Arthur made Sir Gaheris to wed the lady Linet and Sir Agravaine to wed the lady Laurel. And to the lady Lenora he gave a rich bee of gold, but to the others he made no gift, because of their murder of King Pellinore and Sir Lamorak.

CHAPTER XIV

How Sir Launcelot Slew Sir Gambrail in Battle

WHILE matters so sped at Kinkenadan, Sir Launcelot and his kinsmen lay in London for a sennight, and then, having got them horses, their whole array set their faces for the country of Cameliard, where the strength of Sir Gambrail had by now waxed very great. At the same time Sir Launcelot sent a swift pricker to the Queen, at Camelot, praying that she would meet them at Vagon and thence ride with them to Cameliard; for, in her own country, she had many who held to her greatly. Then the same messenger rode on to Kinkenadan, to King Arthur, praying him that he would send to the Castle of Lianours, in Listinois, any such knights as he might wish to make common cause with Sir Launcelot for the overthrow of Sir Gambrail.

So, within a while, they were all gathered together in the Castle of Lianours, and, from King Arthur's Court, thither came Sir Gawaine, Sir Agravaine, Sir Gaheris, and Sir Gareth, but Sir Mordred came not. Besides these there came Sir Palomides, Sir Brennor, Sir Hildebrand, Sir Dinadan, Sir Pelleas, Sir Safere, Sir Sagwarides, and Sir Griflet whom men called *de fils de Dieu*, because that, in his face, he bore a likeness to the Saviour. And from Joyous Garde came Sir Tristram, for Sir Launcelot had sent praying him, as he loved him, that he would come; and this he did because that he would have short tidings of his lady Elaine and his son Galahad.

So, as the book saith, before this great array, Sir Gambrail withdrew all his strength into the Castle of Pristoun, and there shut himself up with all his following, esteeming that Sir Launcelot would hardly overpass the water. Howbeit, this he did, by means of great rafts, and so hemmed Sir Gambrail in upon three sides, and on the fourth side there lay the river.

Thus then they lay continually till that winter was near come, wherewith—they within the walls having but short victual, and they without but cold harbourage—Sir Gambrail sent a hostage to Sir Launcelot with these words:

"My fair lord, seeing that winter is well-nigh come upon us and that unto all of us this siege bringeth great weariness, I will, an it so please thee, ride forth and do battle alone with thee, Sir Launcelot, upon a covenant that, should I prevail, then will this Kingdom of Cameliard be mine to rule in peace so long as I be on live."

Thereto Sir Launcelot sent back word as follows :

"Sir Gambrail, for the better saving of life and for the advantaging of our two armies, I will make with you that covenant whereunto ye seek, and therefore take heed that, upon any day that you may appoint, on that day will I make me ready to do battle with you."

So, between them, a day was appointed and, when that day was come, Sir Gambrail rode forth from the castle gate, a big and proper man on a very noble horse ; and presently there came to meet him Sir Launcelot on his black horse *Grain* ; and so, when those two knights had saluted each the other, they then departed from one another and, turning, came together as hard as they might drive ; and such was the might with which they met that Sir Launcelot reeled in his saddle and was like to have fallen, but the other was hurled from his horse to the earth so that he broke his back and died where he lay.

Then, so soon as it was known to all men that Sir Gambrail was surely dead, all those recreant lords and knights who had made common cause with him came forth and knelt upon their knees before Sir Launcelot, praying mercy of him. But he looked coldly upon them and made them all to be bound hand and foot and cast into wagons, for were they not traitors to his lord, the King ? Then he appointed Sir Griflet to be lord of that Castle of Pristoun, to hold it for the King henceforward, and, when he had so done, he and all those knights that were with him made back to Mameceaster, and, with them, went all those recreant lords and knights, bound hand and foot and wallowing in wagons like so many swine.

So, within a while, they came to Mameceaster, and there, in a meadow beyond the walls, Sir Launcelot made Sir Hildebrand to sit on a fair throne, all nobly dressed in a robe of scarlet sendal furred with miniver ; and on his right hand sat Queen Gueneviere in very fair array, and Queen Morgan le Fay sat on the other ; and below his feet was a block, beside which the headsman stood, axe in hand. Then all those recreant lords and knights, with their hands still bound behind

their backs, were made to drag themselves on their knees through the mire for a good bow-draft, with men beside to goad them on should they falter. So, within a while, they came, all besweat and grimed with mire, to where the throne stood, and there they laid their foreheads to the ground and so remained for a long while, silent and still. Then Sir Launcelot said in a great voice :

"Ye recreant lords and knights, and traitors to the King, what have ye to say why ye should not die ? "

Whereto, for a time, they made no reply, and then one, Sir Hew of North Galis, lifted up his forehead from the ground and said :

"My lord, Sir Launcelot, we be no traitors to King Arthur, for not of our own goodwill were we in the company of this fellow, but for fear of our lives, for so did he threaten us."

"Can one man so threaten two score ? " Sir Launcelot asked of him.

"In good sooth, my lord, he can, when the two score lack a leader," he said.

"Well then," said Sir Launcelot, "an ye be not traitors, ye be worms."

"Yet worms have their use," said Sir Hew.

Then Sir Launcelot spoke long and earnestly with the Queen and with Sir Hildebrand and, anon, he raised his voice and said on high :

"Sir Hew, Sir Bryan, Sir Madok, and others who have fallen away from your allegiance, although ye be all traitors and worthy of death, yet hath it pleased the Queen, of her great goodness, to grant you your lives, so as ye will swear on your heads for to serve Sir Hildebrand well and truly, so long as he pays truage to King Arthur."

Thereupon, with one accord, they all swore fealty to Sir Hildebrand, and then they were loosed from their bonds. So that matter was happily concluded, and Sir Launcelot sent back word of its ending to King Arthur and besought him that he would come to Cameliard, so soon as he well might, for to receive the homage of Sir Hildebrand ; but the King would not, for he had other matters on hand, and so he bade Sir Launcelot deal in all things as he might think best.

When they were all once again gathered together at Mameceaster there was great joy, I ween, among all those knights and gentlewomen that were there, with much feasting and all

manner of minstrelsy and merry-making. But wit you well that, among all those minstrels that were there, none sang so sweetly as did Sir Tristram, for he sang as no man had yet heard him sing; but, after a while, he wearied of making music and—putting aside his harp—moved to where Sir Launcelot sat apart; and they two spoke long and earnestly together, for there was much that Sir Launcelot would learn of the other. So now he spoke of many things close to his heart—of the lady Elaine and her son, of Haviland and Joyous Garde, and of how Sir Tristram had fared with those whilom rebellious lords of the country of Sarras. But chiefly it was of the lady Elaine that he sought tidings. How fared she? Did she greatly mourn his absence? Did Sir Tristram bear from her any word of love to her lord?

"Why," said Sir Tristram, "such messages of love she charged me with as no man that liveth could bear in his head."

"The words are no such great matter," said Sir Launcelot, "so only she doth greet me lovingly."

"Have no fear," Sir Tristram said, "she cries for you as a netted fish cries for the sea."

"And I for her," said he.

Now, as he spoke these words, it so was that Queen Morgan le Fay passed by where those two knights sat, and, when she heard Sir Launcelot's words, she stood still and said:

"Who is this, Sir Launcelot, for whom you cry so loudly?"

"Why, madam," said he, somewhat abashed, for what he had said had been for Sir Tristram's ear and none other, "for whom else than for my sweet lady Elaine, who dwelleth at Corbin?"

Now, when she heard these words, Queen Morgan le Fay cast about in her mind how she had best deal, for, as it seemed to her, there might be good profit to herself in Sir Launcelot's present mood. So, for a while, she stood still in thought, and then she bent low over Sir Launcelot and said:

"Sir, so you would truly see your lady wife, it is not beyond my compass, for trust thou well that it is not lightly that I am named sorceress."

"Madam," said he, "this is hardly to be believed."

"Well then," she said, "would you make trial of my skill?"

And, when he was quickly consenting thereto, she bade him rise and follow her, and so brought him, within a while, to an

inner chamber, over the doorway of which hung a curtain of rich velvet.

When they were there come, she bade him sit upon a siege that was therein, and, when he had so done, she drew forth a small mirror from her satchel, and bade him look upon it steadfastly.

"So your eyes rest continually upon the mirror," she said, "within a space, so God me bless, you shall see your lady Elaine. But, should you look aside, to the right hand or to the left, wit you well that the spell will be broken."

Thereupon Sir Launcelot, even as she bade him, gazed continually upon the mirror, and, trust thou well, Queen Morgan le Fay watched him full wickedly. Then, within a while, she came to where he sat and pressed her hand upon his brow, and, with that, he closed his eyes as one who sleeps.

So then Queen Morgan le Fay seemed well content, and lightly made she back to where Queen Gueneviere sat in the hall and so whispered in her ear softly, whereupon the Queen's eyes opened very round and then half closed again, and she laughed silently, as one who laughs half in shame.

"Mercy!" she said, "are you indeed sure?"

"As sure as I am of death," said Morgan le Fay; "therefore make no further tarrying, but come."

So then those two went forth from the hall together, with none heeding them; and, when they were come to where Sir Launcelot sat, Morgan le Fay said:

"Sir Launcelot, when you open your eyes, there shall stand before you the lady Elaine, your fair wife. Now open your eyes."

So, when she had said, she passed quickly forth from that inner chamber; but, trust thou well that, with her, went not forth Queen Gueneviere.

So then Sir Launcelot opened his eyes and cast them about the room; and when they lit upon the lady Gueneviere, wit you well he was a glad man.

"Is it indeed thou, my sweet lady Elaine?" he said.

Now, when she had come within the Great Hall, Morgan le Fay stood for a while as though in thought. Then lightly stepped she back to where the velvet curtain hung and so drew it aside and looked within. At that which she saw she smiled to herself well pleased, and so made back to where Sir Gawaine, Sir Agravaine, and Sir Gaheris sat, drinking and laughing as men who are very merry.

"Come," said she to those three brothers, "for I have that for your eyes that you should surely see."

With that, she beckoned them with her finger, and they, with one accord, rose from their places and went with her across the hall to where hung the velvet curtain, and through this she bade them look. Thereupon they all looked, one following the other, and at that which they saw Sir Agravaire and Sir Gaheris laughed; but Sir Gawaine did not laugh, and his face grew black as a winter storm-cloud.

"Here is some foul sorcery of thine, mine aunt Morgan," he said. "Is it forsooth a cause for pride or for mirth that you should work this wickedness against the noblest and most worshipful knight in Christendom?"

"What wickedness have I worked, good my nephew?" she asked. "Mebeseemeth it is of others that you should so speak, and not of me."

"You have bewitched him," he said; "full well I know it."

"Nay," said she, "not I, but the lady Gueneviere, fair nephew."

"That can hardly be," said he, "for the lady Gueneviere hath, for many a sad day past, as all at Camelot well know, wasted her enchantments where she would have had them bear fruit. This is some sorcery of thine."

Therewith he turned back into the hall very wrath, with Morgan le Fay making hotly on his heels.

"Gawaine," she said, "you are but a fool. Is not this all to your profit?"

"To mine?" said he.

"Surely," said Queen Morgan. "Could we but bring strife between Arthur and Launcelot, the kingdom is yours. Without Launcelot at his right hand, Arthur's power would slip from him like a dream. Whom else hath he to uphold him? Balin, Balan, and Lamorak are dead. Cornwall, North Gore, and North Galis are ripe for revolt. This kingdom of Camelard will never rest with Hildebrand. You yourself could seize and hold it with but little pain. Gaheris hath the Castle of Balrig, and Agravaire and Mordred could seize Listinois as readily as did Gambrail. Who then would be left to Arthur, were he and Launcelot at enmity? Not Tristram surely, for he so long as he lives will make common cause with Launcelot for good or ill."

"All this savours of foul treason, mine aunt Morgan," Sir Gawaine said, when she had made an end, "and, wit you well

that, in any treason against my lord, King Arthur, or against Sir Launcelot, I will have neither act nor part."

"You speak but foolishness, good my nephew," Morgan le Fay said. "Is it treason to plot against a usurper? This Arthur is a bastard, as all men wot well. Even Merlin could not say the contrary. Full many a time hath my mother, Igraine, told me that she was Arthur's mother against her will; for, wit you well, she held Uther Pendragon in endless abhorrence because that he slew Gorlois, my father, in his own Castle of Tintagil; so, good my nephew, be not over hasty to cry treason upon me; for this Arthur, I wot, is no fit King for Britain. Is he not half Roman and therefore to be abhorred? You be more King than he, by many degrees, for you are of the blood of Gorlois."

Thus spake Morgan le Fay, and, as she so spake, ever more and more and more grew the wrath in the heart of Sir Gawaine. So, when she had made an end, "My aunt Morgan," he said, "all that you tell me may well be true. Howbeit, my fealty is sworn to mine uncle, King Arthur, and him will I serve truly and well till the day I die; for, wit you well, mine aunt, that liefer would I cut off my right hand than raise it against the man who made me knight."

"Then," said she, "you are but a fool, my fair nephew Gawaine. Your brother, Agravaine, I warrant me, would prove less backward, and, if not he, then Gaheris or Mordred. These two will know right well how to deal when the hour smites, else am I no true prophetess. Mark how, even now, Agravaine whispers in the ear of the lady Laurel. Mark how her eyes open and gleam. This matter will run through the Court as fire runs along a sun-dried heath. See Linet too, how eagerly she bends her ear to the tale which Gaheris tells her. What two women know the whole Court will know before another sun be set. Trust thou well, my nephew, the seed hath been sown this night that will, in the end, break up this noble fellowship of the Round Table and sweep Arthur headlong from his throne."

"And, if so, then will the shame thereof lie at thy door, mine aunt," said he.

"Well, and what of it?" she said. "I hate Arthur. As to that, let us make no false pretending. His father slew my father, and I would slay him, an I so might. Did not you slay Pellinore for even less cause?"

• Now, when she had so spoken, Sir Gawaine turned

upon her so fiercely that, for very fear, she leapt back a span.

"In good sooth," said he, "I slew Pellinore, and slew him for love of my father, Lot; and, for love of Arthur and Launcelot, I would slay any that wrought them ill—even you, mine aunt Morgan, as Gaheris slew our mother Morgawse."

At these words, wit you well that Queen Morgan's face waxed pale, but, anon, her colour came to her again.

"You are a strange, fierce man, Gawaine," she said. "All that I may I do to advantage you, and, for guerdon, you threaten me with death."

"What you have wrought," said he, "you have wrought, not for love of me, but for hate of Arthur, and, wit you well, mine aunt, that whosoever wounds Arthur wounds me, for I love him more than all the world of men, and, after him, Launcelot; and so, mine aunt Morgan, beware. You are doubtless, as all men say, a great sorceress, but will your sorcery avail you against the thrust of a glaive? We sons of Lot are of a fierce blood and it is ill for any to push us whither we would not."

"Nor would I be one to do so willingly," she said.

"Well, rest assured that any who may strike at Arthur strikes at me, and I will strike back quick and short, even though it may be at those of my own blood."

Wherewith he left her and passed away.

CHAPTER XV

How Sir Tristram Dwelt with the Lady Isolde at Joyous Garde

IN the morning next following, at the hour of prime, Sir Tristram rode forth from the gates of Mameceaster and, with him, for a league or so upon his road to Joyous Garde, went Sir Launcelot, for he had that for his ear which were better said under God's clear sky than within the walls of castles. So they rode forth together, the one making but heavy cheer and the other careless and gladsome as is the lark in springtime. So, when he marked how doleful a countenance the other wore, Sir Tristram said :

"Have you a fever or an ague, good Sir Launcelot, that you wear so doleful a countenance on so fair a day?"

"A malady I truly have," said Sir Launcelot, "but not such as any leech may heal me of."

"Who then?" said he.

"As for that," said Sir Launcelot, "I know not. But I fear me greatly that I am in some part bewitched."

"Well from that," said Sir Tristram, "may Jesu defend us all; for thereby may the mightiest be laid low."

"My lord, Sir Tristram," said he, "tell me, I pray of you, truly. After that I parted from you last night, heard you any bruit in the great hall anent me?"

"Of a surety, I did," said Sir Tristram, "for your overthrow of Sir Gambrail was on every man's tongue. Jesu! what a buffet he had of you and how straight and gallantly your good horse bore down upon him! Now, this *Passe-Brewel* of mine, though staunch enough to endure such buffets as may come his way, has at time the trick of——"

"Oh, I prithee, make an end," said Sir Launcelot, "for my thoughts are otherwise disposed. Heard you aught that touched my honour?"

"That is as it may be," said Sir Tristram. "Honour! What is honour and what is dishonour? If it be dishonour to love a Queen, then am I dishonoured indeed; but I hold it no dishonour."

"But, as you should wot right well," said Sir Launcelot, "I love no Queen, but my lady Elaine only."

"Ah, well!" said he, "that which a man loves to-night he may well have but little love for to-morn. With me the nearest is ever the dearest, for I am not so shaped as to feed on memories and hopes."

"And yet," said he, "you came back to the lady Isolde."

"Truly," said Sir Tristram, "I came back to her, even as you will, anon, come back to the lady Elaine, and love her none the less dearly because that, at this time or that, your eye may have lit lightly on another."

"Sir Tristram," said he, "so you speak in that fashion, you and I are like to fall out, for, wit you well that mine eye hath lit lightly on none other."

At this Sir Tristram turned away and whistled softly to the red and yellow trees that hedged them in to right and left.

"Well, my lord, Sir Launcelot," said he, "an that be so, then indeed have men's tongues wagged to a false tune."

"Have I not said that I was bewitched?" said he.

"Ah!" said Sir Tristram, "who is there among us but hath, this time or that, been bewitched by dark eyes and soft lips?"

"Peace!" Sir Launcelot said, in a great voice, "or I shall hardly keep my hand from you. I speak of no such sorceries as these but of the accursed magic of Queen Morgan le Fay."

"Morgan le Fay!" said he, "and wherewith hath she offended thee?"

"She hath offended me in this wise, that, of her malice to me ward, she hath put her evil magic upon me and thereby touched mine honour, and, furthermore, hath she touched the honour of my lord, King Arthur, which is a thing not lightly to be borne."

"Sir Launcelot," said Sir Tristram, "you are, as all the world holds, a passing good knight with lance or sword, but, in the matter of life, you are but as a newborn babe. Why weep over that which is past and beyond remedy? No man is wise at all times, and therefore to scourge yourself for follies which have been thrust upon you by chance rather than by choice is to be a fool indeed. The man who wears a long face for a short folly had best become a monk forthwith. As for me, although I be rightly named Tristram, because of the sorrowful manner of my birth, it is ever the other way, for,

the longer the folly, the shorter my face, and, the shorter the folly, the longer my face because of its shortness."

"As for that," said Sir Launcelot, "you may dispose your life as you list, and that without reproach from any, but with me it is far otherwise. For, trust thou well, Sir Tristram, that I cannot put from me as I would that which wars against my honour and my fealty."

"Tush!" said the other, "you are over-nice in such matters."

"With you it may so seem," said Sir Launcelot, "but, wit you well, Sir Tristram, that I have been brought hither for to win, if so may be, the Round Table fellowship from evil ways, and now am I, as it would seem, shamed beyond remedy before those whose ways I would rebuke by mine example. How can I wear a glad face, such as yours, when the Round Table fellowship holdeth me for a traitor to the King I serve and to the trust he hath in me?"

"So God me bless, Sir Launcelot," said the other, "no man is traitor without the will to be traitor. Happenings that come unawares make a traitor of no man. So shorten thy face, my fair lord, and comfort thee, as I do, with good resolves for the morrow, and, if these resolves take contrary shape, well then fill their place with new ones, and so will thine outlook ever be saintly."

"And thy performance ever the contrary," said Sir Launcelot, "but enough of this; for very sure am I that such crafty reasoning availeth no man anything, so of that let us make a short end. But this much I require of thee, Sir Tristram before that we two part, which is that thou bring word to my lady Elaine of my steadfast love to her ward. For, as it seemeth to me, there is no remedy but that I must to her, or she to me, and this last I would not have lest mischief might befall her. So must I find some other means with the King. Had you not the country of Sarras in such good subjection, therein might be found some means to bring me thither, but mebesemeth that were now but an idle pretence."

"Truly," said Sir Tristram, "I have those whilom unruly lords as tame as Lent lambs; for though, at the first, they had some despite unto me, trust thou well that, now, no bondsmen could be meeker."

"Then," said he, "must I find some other means, for thereunto am I fully resolved."

So now these two had ridden well-nigh upon a league and

farther than that Sir Launcelot had no will to ride, for they were come to the passage of a river which was swollen by the rains, and he had no present mind for a wet skin.

"Fare thee well, Sir Tristram," he said, "for as at present I may not ride with thee farther, God speed thee, and see to it that by any means that be to hand thou send me quick tidings of my lady Elaine."

"In good sooth will I," said Sir Tristram, "and, as for you, Sir Launcelot, an I may so counsel you, deal not too niggardly with fair gentlewomen, for therein lieth your greatest peril."

So those two parted, but, anon to Sir Tristram, as he rode northward, there came a quick resolve, at which he smiled well pleased.

"Methinks," said he, in the ear of his good horse *Passe-Brewel*, "that I may yet devise a remedy for Sir Launcelot's sickness, and that remedy, God willing, will I shortly apply; but whether he will bless me for it, or curse me, I know not."

So rode he onward for four days, with song upon his lips and in his heart, and, on the fourth day, he came to Joyous Garde; and there, in the gateway, stood the lady Isolde bright-eyed and smiling as the springtime, and, so sweet did she seem in his eyes, that straightway he leapt from his horse and caught her about the middle, and then he lifted her high above his head, and there held her laughing and kicking till he set her down once more upon her feet.

That night, as they sat at supper, Sir Tristram told the lady Isolde of that which he had in mind, which was to let cry through the land that the lords of Bernicia had rebelled against the King, for then, as it seemed to him, Sir Launcelot must needs ride thither for to subdue those rebel lords, and so would he and the lady Elaine come together once again and quickly. Now, when she heard him so say, the lady Isolde knit her brows in thought, for wit you well that many things came therewith to her mind, and, among others, the thought that of late her lord's eye had rested too long and too gladly on the lady Elaine's fairness.

"Surely," said she, "it were better done that Elaine should ride to Camelot. What hinders her?"

"Sir Launcelot fears a mischief for her at the Queen's hands," he said.

Therewith there leaped into the lady Isolde's eyes a sudden gleam as of the gleam of a torch that men wave upon the waters, but Sir Tristram saw it not, for it was dark.

"This that you tell me I may not readily believe," she said, "for I dare boldly undertake that it is for his better freedom with the Queen that he would keep the lady Elaine from him."

"As for that," said Sir Tristram, "very sure am I that you are at fault, for, as I well believe, his heart is wholly with the lady Elaine."

"Well then," said she, "let Elaine seek him."

So then Sir Tristram once more told her in plain words how that Sir Launcelot would not have her so do, as at that time, because of his fears.

"Well then," said she, "at the least tell her of his fears and so can she please herself." For right gladly would she have put the length of the land between her lord and the lady Elaine.

So, on the day next following, those two rode over to the Castle of Corbin, and there they told to the lady Elaine all that Sir Launcelot had said.

"But for what cause," said she, "should the Queen wish me ill?"

Now, when she had so said, both Sir Tristram and the lady Isolde held long silence, for, soothly, this question came upon the knight unawares and therefore could he find no ready answer. But wit you well that with the lady Isolde it was far otherwise, for very surely had she wist, of her craft, that the lady Elaine would ask of them this very thing; and very surely, too, had she wist that, so she held her peace and made no answer, the lady Elaine would never rest but she might ride for Camelot; for times there are when silence speaks louder than many words. Thus it was that, when those two held silence and looked this way and that, as though in shame, the lady Elaine went red from one ear to the other and from her neck to her brow. So, within a while, she said:

"To-morn, I will set forth for Camelot."

Then, the better to push her resolve to a conclusion, those three must needs seek out Earl Pelles, where he sat in the great hall with Galahad at his side—a pale, slender boy with eyes like stars.

"My lord and father," said the lady Elaine, all a-heat with the strength of her purpose, "I would, of your good will, ride to-morn for Camelot."

"Mercy on us!" cried he, "but this savoureth of madness."

"To you it may so seem," said she, "but, wit you well, my father, that Sir Launcelot hath sore need of me, for of this Sir Tristram bringeth short tidings."

Wherewith, when Earl Pelles turned to him, Sir Tristram said :

"Fair lord, in this the lady Elaine speaks but sooth. Howbeit, I would have you know that Sir Launcelot is full loth that she should thither ride, for fear lest evil might befall her."

"Evil!" cried Earl Pelles, "and why forsooth should evil befall her?"

"Why indeed?" said the lady Elaine, "and therefore would I ride to-morn."

"That you shall not by my good will," said her father, "for, wit you well, fair daughter, that it is over late in the year for such adventures. Bide you here till the springtime and then will I make such good provision that you come to Camelot richly arrayed and well beseen, as befitteth an earl's daughter. But now, what with tempests and the lengthening nights, you could scarce win there without great peril and misadventure."

Now, when he so said, the lady Elaine's heart waxed heavy within her, for it was not to be denied but that he spake wisdom; and so was it manifest to all those who were with her.

"Your father speaks sooth, lady Elaine," said Sir Tristram; "bide you here for a season yet, and then, when the springtime be come, may you set forth with comfort to yourself and honour to your good lord, Sir Launcelot."

"You counsel me," she said, "contrary to that which I would hear."

"But of our wisdom you surely make no question?" said the Earl; wherewith he pointed with his hand towards the sea, which was white with a thousand wind-driven waves, and all around the castle the wind howled and the rain lashed in torrents.

So when she had looked upon the sea, the lady Elaine made right heavy cheer, for to that which the tempest said there was in truth no answer; and, as for the lady Isolde, she too held silence, for in truth she could light upon no words whereby to speed her cause. So, in the end, the lady Elaine said sorrowfully :

"Well, so be it; I will even endure through the winter and then will I ride forth to my dear lord. But I require of you

all, as you love me, that the noise of this doth not get abroad, else might he gainsay me."

So, thereat, Sir Tristram and the lady Isolde departed and rode back through the tempest to Joyous Garde; and, all through that winter, the lady Elaine abode at Corbin, labouring diligently at her tambour and beguiling her son Galahad with many old tales of the Romans. And ever and anon would Sir Tristram ride over from Joyous Garde to bear her company. Then would she bid him tell her again and yet again the tale of Sir Launcelot's prowess in field and tourney—of his overthrow of Sir Turquin and of Sir Gambrail, and of his meeting with Sir Tristram himself in the lists at Camelot.

And ever, right loyally, did Sir Tristram sing the praises of his friend.

"Wit you well, fair lady Elaine," said he, "that never or the coming of Sir Launcelot, had I been matched with spear or sword in any land, but ever had I the mastery. For, as all men know, I slew Sir Marhaus, who was the mightiest knight in Ireland, in fair and open fight, and his shield I bear continually to this day; and then, in the kingdom of Bretagne, where I had harbourage with King Hoël, after that my uncle Mark banished me, I gained the degree in every tourney in the land, so that, as all men said, no man might withstand me, and of this was I myself well persuaded. And then, when all men cried out that I had no match within the world, came Sir Launcelot and put me to the worse with spear and then with sword, and so do I most truly believe would he ever do. But now are he and I under covenant to meddle no more each with other, for truly do I love him better than any knight that liveth, for, as he is the greatest knight of the world, so is he also the meekest and the most courteous."

Then was the lady Elaine very greatly rejoiced to hear her lord so praised; and her son Galahad, who stood by, cried out:

"Even so will I do when I come to man's estate," but at this his mother looked but ill pleased, for she feared to lose him from her side. So then she bade Galahad go find Dame Brisen, and, when he was departed, she asked Sir Tristram concerning Isolde of the White Hands who was King Hoël's daughter and, as many said, Sir Tristram's wife; but never a word would he answer beyond this:

"She had that she merited," and this he said so often as she asked him.

So sped the days of winter ; and many a time Earl Pelles would call for his horse-litter, and then he and his daughter would get them across to Joyous Garde ; and many a time, too, would Sir Tristram ride to the Castle of Corbin. And, when that fell out then would the lady Elaine ever keep Galahad close at her side, for better safety, for Sir Tristram's eye dwelt upon her more kindly than she would wish ; albeit, in good sooth, he had no thought of treachery in his heart. Howbeit he held her to be very fair, and that much his looks told plainly. So it was that, when they were all together at Joyous Garde, then would the lady Isolde ever be close at hand with smiles of welcome in her eyes but with little love for Elaine in her heart, for full well wist she that Sir Tristram was as unstable in love as the rushes on the windswept sand-hills ; and little wish had she to share the fate of her namesake of the white hands.

Howbeit, for all her fears, those days were very sweet and pleasant to the lady Elaine, for, so joyous and debonair a knight was Sir Tristram, that, in his company, none could wear a sad countenance for long, and, when he sang to his harp, the very wind would cease, to listen, so sweetly did he sing. As for the bruit anent the Queen and Sir Launcelot, he blew it all aside with scornful mockery, lying to the lady Elaine so staunchly that, in the end, she too laughed at her fears, believing him.

For so it was with Sir Tristram that, in such high affection did he hold the lady Elaine, that sooner would he be sad himself than see her sad, and so ever he extolled Sir Launcelot's constancy, and dwelt largely upon the vain sighs of all the fair ladies of the Court, to the great comfort and solace of her soul. Thus, then, dealt he ever in right true and chivalrous wise ; but wit ye well that, had she not been Sir Launcelot's wife and he Sir Launcelot's friend, he would have dealt far otherwise, for such was ever his wont with ladies.

CHAPTER XVI

How the Lady Elaine Rode from Corbin to Camelot on a Quest

SO passed the days of winter, stormy or calm, rainy or fair, as are the days of the country of Sarras in winter and the days of man's life at all seasons ; and, when the springtime was come, bashful as a maiden, the lady Elaine called to her Dame Brisen and said :

" Bring me, I pray you, from the chest beneath the stairway, my richest robe and bestow it carefully in leather wallets so that, when I come to Camelot, I may be well beseen, and so may I find favour in my lord's eyes and not shame him before the Court."

Then, when the month of May was come, she went to Earl Pelles and said :

" My lord and father, now by your good will must I set forth upon my journey, for the springtime is come, and full fair and long are the days for riding."

So, when he could say nothing to the contrary, she did as she had long planned in her mind, and so, on a day, she set forth, with Haviland in her company, wearing a coarse and common habit, for the saving of her robes and for better safety from robbers. To the far end of the bridge, where it joined the mainland, came Earl Pelles with Dame Brisen, and Eric leading the little horse on which Galahad rode ; and there they made their farewells, and all of them wept at the parting that they made, save only the boy Galahad, who wept not but said :

" There is no cause for weeping, for my lady mother will come back to me before two moons have passed, and why, therefore, weep ? "

But they heeded not his words but as the empty prattle of a child, and so, at length, waving and weeping, the lady Elaine passed beyond the trees and was seen no more.

Thereafter, for fourteen days, she and Haviland rode without adventure, and then, on the fifteenth day, they came to the City of Vagon, where the Roman bridge is built across Thames, and there they made inquiry for a nunnery, and

when they learned of one that was at Basing, they rode thither that same evening, and there Elaine lay the night, while Haviland found lodging in the town.

Now, on the morn, at prime, the lady Elaine rose from her bed and called to her the nuns, and they drew forth from her wallet a robe of cloth of gold, very rare and precious, and in this the nuns arrayed her with deft hands, marvelling at its beauty. Then they wove her yellow hair into two long ropes and girt her head about with a band of blue sendal. So, when she had heard Mass and broken her fast, she set forth for Camelot, with joy and fear warring in her heart; and then, when she and Haviland had ridden for the space of three hours or thereby, on a sudden their eyes lit upon the great golden dome of the Round Hall, where it rose from among the trees, glittering in the sun like some great jewel. Whereupon she wist well that they were come to their journey's end, and so bade Haviland withdraw him a little behind her. Then, within a while, they came to the houses of the city and their horses hoofs rang loudly on the paving of the street, so that many a head was thrust forth to gaze curiously at this fair lady, so young and well beseen, who thus rode toward the palace. Then, at length, came they to the gate of the palace, and there, for a while, the heart of the lady Elaine failed her, for, in good sooth, the adventure which she had in hand was a great one, and very far away seemed her home in the country of Sarras and Earl Pelles and Eric and Dame Brisen. Right as she there sat her horse in doubt and trembling, the porter came forth and eyed her curiously.

"Fair lady," said he, "whom seek ye?"

"I seek Sir Launcelot du Lac," she said.

Now at this the porter laughed aloud and none too sweetly.

"Well then, madam," he said, "you are on no rare quest, for I dare say that there be never a damsel nor a gentlewoman in Logris but casts about in her mind how she can have speech with Sir Launcelot. Would you lead him on some quest?"

"I have no quest on which I may lead him," she said, "but right willingly would I have speech with him."

At this the porter looked upon her in some doubt, for, for all there lay a certain warranty in the richness of her dress and in the bearing of her man-at-arms, yet had others come in like guise to Camelot who had wrought sore mischief to those they sought, and had thereby greatly imperilled him his office. Should Sir Launcelot be offended, as it seemed to him,

things might go hardly with him. But yet, again, there might be more offence in "Nay" than in "Yea," aye, in good sooth, there might, for it was no light matter to turn away a lady so fair and well beseen. So, weighing this against that in his mind, he turned to the lady Elaine, where she sat silent upon her horse, and said :

"Madam, it so fortunes that Sir Launcelot is even now within the palace. Therefore I would pray you to abide here by the gateway and I will bear him word of your coming ; but see to it that you stir not from where you be, else may it go ill with you."

Therewith he turned him away and slowly made across the courtelage till he was lost to view behind an angle of the palace. Then indeed did the lady Elaine's heart beat fast and hard as though it would burst its bonds, for wit you well that two long years had passed since last she had looked upon her lord or he on her, and this in truth is a long time for those who love dearly. So she wondered greatly how he would look upon her now—whether wrathfully, for going counter to his wishes, or tenderly, because of his love ?

Even as she there sat, debating of these things within her mind, she became aware of the porter that came towards her, and, close behind him, followed her dear lord, Sir Launcelot, clad in plain shirt and breeches and with his head bare. So he came straight to where she sat, but so busied was he with his thoughts, that, as he went, his eyes were continually on the ground and he saw her not. Then, on a sudden, as he came to where she sat all a-tremble at his nearness, he raised his eyes and saw her, and, at that, the blood left his face and he stood there stonied, as one that sees death before him. So he stood while one might count fifty, and then he thrust before him his two hands and cried out so that all might hear him :

"Avoid thee, sorceress ; in the name of Jesus Christ our Saviour avoid thee."

Therewith, wit you well, the lady Elaine waxed pale as one that is dead, and hardly might she sit upon her horse for shame and fear.

"Alas ! my fair lord," she said, "these be hard words indeed !"

But, for all that she spoke thus lovingly, yet was his dread of her in no wise abated, so that he withdrew him from her as though she had been the fiend himself ; and in like wise

too did the porter, for very sure was he now that this that seemed to be so fair a lady was in truth the very fiend from hell, come hither to work what ill he might.

Thus, as they all stood there in doubt and trembling, Haviland pricked his horse forward through the gateway.

"My lord, my lord," said he, "what madness is this? Know you not your fair lady and your own true squire?" Whereat Sir Launcelot looked from one to the other as though in doubt of that which he saw.

"Haviland!" said he, "is it indeed thou?"

"In very sooth, my good lord, it is," said he, "Haviland, thy squire, and none other."

"Then, in God's name," said Sir Launcelot, "who is that lady beside thee that seemeth so fair to the eye?"

"Why, my lord," said he, "know you not your own true lady Elaine?"

"Ah!" said he, "would to God that it were she."

"Of a truth, my lord, it is none other," said the squire.

"Alas! Haviland," said Sir Launcelot, "little wottest thou of that which sorcery may encompass."

So, for a while, Sir Launcelot stood there as one bemused, and all this while the lady Elaine sat upon her horse and moved not. Then, on a sudden, he came to a quick resolve and so turned him to the porter and said:

"Fellow, get you within the palace and pray the Queen, of her great goodness, that she come hither so soon as she may to greet the lady Elaine, who hath come a long journey and now sitteth her horse beside the gateway. So tarry not, but make the best speed you may."

Thereupon the porter departed as he had been bidden, while those others stayed beside the gateway, and no word spake any of them, for it is not to be denied that they deemed that Sir Launcelot had been mad. Then, after a little, it so was that the lady Elaine could no longer hold silent, so she turned her to where Sir Launcelot stood and said:

"My fair lord, I pray thee speak with me a little."

"Peace! thou sorceress," said he, "else may I slay thee with my two hands."

So, thereafter, she said no more but wept silently where she sat upon her palfrey. Thus, then, they all remained for a great while, and then, at the last, came the Queen to them, all in green and silver and with her golden hair in ropes upon her shoulders, as was her wont.

Then was Sir Launcelot a right joyful man, for now he knew of a surety that the lady who sat on her horse thus soberly before him was the lady Elaine and no other ; but for the shame that was in his heart he might not yet speak to her.

Then came the Queen across the courtelage, stepping lightly and daintily as a fawn that crosses a lawn in the forest, and, when she was come to the lady Elaine, she placed her hand upon the bow of her saddle and said :

“ Well be ye come to this our Court, my lady Elaine, for much have we heard spoken of your beauty and of the great love that is between you and my lord, Sir Launcelot.”

So the lady Elaine thanked her as well as she was able, but, because that her heart was like to burst with sorrow, she might not readily find words, and ever, as the face of the lady Elaine waxed more and more wan, by so much the more did the Queen smile upon her, for, to say sooth, the Queen found her less fair than she had been noised, by reason that her face was blanched and wan with sorrow, and her eyes reddened with weeping ; so, when the Queen marked this, she thought within herself :

“ Surely am I fairer than she,” and so was her mood softened.

So the lady Elaine lighted down from her horse, and then the Queen took her by the hand and led her through the great doorway of the palace and up the winding stone stairway within, till they came to a small chamber of which the window gave upon the open fields.

So, when she had brought her within the chamber, the Queen kissed her in full friendly fashion and so departed.

Now, as all men wot well even to this day, the great palace of King Arthur at Camelot had been built by Merlin, and for richness and beauty might not be equalled within the compass of the earth. For, ever since the days when the Romans had departed out of Britain, the lords thereof had been well content to dwell in rude fenced castles, for their better defence against rogues and robbers. So, when Merlin built the palace at Camelot, men deemed him out of his mind, for it was more temple than castle, and richly built withal with pillars and floors of marble and with walls cunningly painted with figures of knights and dragons. But the marvel of the world, and that at sight of which men drew in their breath, was the Great Round Hall over which there shone a high dome of gold, so strange and wonderful that men said it had been built by

sorcery, and so in truth would Merlin have had them believe, for therein lay his power. But, to speak sooth, there was, at that time, such another dome over the Temple of Vesta at Rome ; and this had Merlin made note of in his travels, and so it pleased him to make fashion one at Camelot, like unto it.

Six years had this palace been in building, for the first stone was laid when Arthur was crowned King at Caerleon upon Usk, and it was not finished till after that Merlin's death had brought King Arthur quickly back from fighting King Ban's battles in Guienne. Merlin himself was buried in the centre of the great courtelage, for so had he himself made men do ; and over his body there was reared a single mighty stone, bearing strange devices of which no man knew the meaning if it were not Endril, who was Merlin's disciple. But Endril held silence and, when men questioned him, would shake his head and say that on the day when the meaning of that writing was spoken Arthur's kingdom would fall from him and the palace would crumble into dust. So all men—even King Arthur—feared Endril, and some there were who counselled that he should be put to death, suddenly and unawares, before that he could speak those dread words.

Now, when the Queen and the lady Elaine had departed toward the palace, Sir Launcelot and Haviland stood a while by the gateway and then Sir Launcelot said :

" Now God be thanked that my fair lady hath come."

" Methought, my lord," said Haviland, " that you did not so thank God when first your eyes lit upon her."

" Alas ! " said he, " I had weened that it was some evil spirit who had taken my lady's likeness."

" From such may Jesu guard us all," said Haviland.

CHAPTER XVII

How, for Fear of the Queen, Sir Launcelot Leapt from a Window

THUS, within a little while, the noise of the lady Elaine's coming to Camelot was in all men's mouths, for, wit you well, this two years past, the Court had marvelled greatly what manner of lady this might be, whose memory alone could make Sir Launcelot blind to all others. But so it was that, now that she was at length come among them, there were no two that saw her alike; for some found her fair as any lady in the land, and others held her to be but moderately fair, while some again there were who could see in her but scant beauty. That which the Queen saw, and of which she had but small joy, was that the lady Elaine was by some years younger than she, and so indeed appeared to the eye, and for this she gave her scant love.

As for the lady Elaine, so cast down was she at the cold cheer she had of her lord, that hardly might she raise her eyes from the ground for shame, and, when they all sat at meat that night in the Round Hall, she looked not once upon Sir Launcelot's face nor he on hers; whereat all that were there wondered greatly, for they had ever understood that his love for her was beyond the common love of men.

Then, when the dinner was ended and many had departed, came the Queen to where Sir Launcelot sat apart, for she had great will to learn for what cause the lady Elaine had come to Camelot, seeing that, now that she was come, her lord looked upon her so coldly.

"What ails you, my lord," she said, "that you make such heavy weather of your fair lady? For fair she truly is."

"God be thanked, madam," said Sir Launcelot, "that you so find her."

"In good sooth, I find her passing fair," said the Queen, "and yet, meseemeth, from the manner of your greeting that you have, or now, had greater joy of the company of others than you have of hers."

"As for that, madam," said he, "trust thou well that all my love hath ever been unto the lady Elaine."

"Mercy on us!" cried the Queen, "but that passeth all belief."

Wherewith she laughed full wickedly.

"Madam," said he, "trust thou well that there is none, how staunch soever he may be, that can prevail against the sorceries of magic."

"Magic!" said she. "*Cerles*, my fair lord, there was no magic that I wot of in the Tower of Vortigern, but the common magic which is every woman's to use."

"Nor," said he, "was there any bandit knight there, holding King Arthur's Queen captive."

Then, at this, the Queen laughed once more, as those laugh whose thoughts please them.

"That was in truth a quick parry and thrust," she said; "anon, Sir Launcelot, we shall have you as ready and apt with your tongue as you are with lance and sword."

"Jesu forbend! lady Gueneviere," said he, "that such should ever be said of me; for I hold it to be but a woman's part to thrust and parry with the tongue."

"Then I will even now play the woman's part, but not to thrust or parry, but to sweep your mind clear of doubts; for now are you continually making great dole, and wearing a face as grim as that of death because of the magic that Queen Morgan le Fay put upon you at Mameceaster, but, wit you well, Sir Launcelot, that I have even more against her than have you, for a woman's honour heals less readily than a man's."

"Now," said he, "do you speak beyond my understanding."

"Well then," she said, "here is my meaning as plainly as one may speak. As I understand, you make endless moan because that, as you suppose, Morgan le Fay bewitched you so that you wist not rightly who I was. But is that good cause why you should hate me, Sir Launcelot? It was not I who bewitched you, but Queen Morgan; and, for your greater comfort, an it may be, Sir Launcelot, wit you well that she likewise bewitched me, so that I knew you not from another and deemed that you had been the King."

At this, for a while, he held silence and then he said:

"Lady Gueneviere, that which you say may well be so, for, wit you well, she is a strong and hardy sorceress. Howbeit, there was no Queen Morgan le Fay at the Tower of Vortigern, and yet, without any sorcery, as it seemed to me, you there deemed that I had been King Arthur."

"Nay," she said, "sorcery there must have been, else had you not thought that I was the lady Elaine."

As she so said, she laughed in great glee, but Sir Launcelot laughed not, but bent his brows very darkly.

"There was no sorcery, madam," he said, "but lying and treason there was in plenty, which to a woman may seem honourable and seemly but to a man savoureth of villainy."

"Trust thou well, Sir Launcelot," said she, "that, when a woman loves, she does not fence her love about with iron bars. She knows but one thing only, which is that she loves, and to the right or left of that she does not look; for all else she holds to be of small account. For I dare boldly say that the woman who weighs the customs of knights in the balance against her love is no true lover, but a huckster counting the cost or gain of that which she gives or takes."

"Madam," said he, "as a simple knight, these things are beyond my understanding."

"Because you do not truly love," she said.

"But, madam," said he, "I hold that I do indeed truly love."

"Ah!" she said, "now I understand well that you speak of the lady Elaine; for ever, as it seemeth to me, she holdeth thee fast, whereof other ladies fare in right niggardly wise. But, were she but clean gone out of this realm of Britain, then I dare truly undertake that there are those within this palace who would greatly profit thereby."

Now it is not to be denied but that, when Queen Gueneviere so said, she looked full fiercely, so that Sir Launcelot was greatly adread for his lady. So, to the Queen he said:

"Trust thou well, madam, that I would slay with my own hands any who mischiefed my lady Elaine."

"And I would slay with my own hands any who came betwixt me and my love," said the Queen.

"Very sure am I," he said, "that one so sweet and fair would work no such wickedness."

"Sir Launcelot," said she, "you are but as a child in the ways of women. Sweet and fair are we indeed where well we love, but, where we hate, we have but scant pity. For my love I would right gladly die and, for my love, I would slay any that stood in the path of my love as I would slay an adder. Come let us traverse no longer with words, for, wit

you well, Sir Launcelot, that you must make short choice between me and your Saxon dame from the Castle of Corbin. Had she but stayed in her own country I had not dealt with her ungently, but, seeing that she hath pushed hither unbidden and to the stinting of my love, wit you well, Sir Launcelot, that I will meet her with spear in rest even as you would meet any bandit knight that aimed to rob you of your maintenance."

Now, as all men held, Sir Launcelot was a man of simple mind, but none so simple withal was he but that he knew right well that there was peril in what answer soever he might make ; for, if he were to answer as the Queen would have him, then was he a lost man indeed, for very sure was he that she would hold him closely to his bond, and so would his honour pass from him for evermore. But, if he said her nay, then, as it seemed to him, were the lady Elaine's days on earth as good as numbered, for, for all his words to the contrary, full well wist he that the Queen would find some means to slay her. And so, seeing great peril in which road soever he ran, he turned him to her and said :

" My lady Gueneviere, trust thou well that no man's eyes may readily light on another when thou art by. Have I, this night, so much as once lifted my eyes to the lady Elaine ? Full well you wot that I have not ; and yet, had you, my lady Gueneviere, not been at my side, it would in truth have been far otherwise."

At these words, I wot, the Queen laughed gladly, for she was well pleased.

" Who would have thought," she said, " that so stern a knight could frame so fair a speech ? But, wit ye well, Sir Launcelot, that with fair speeches will I not long rest content, for these are but lean meat for a hungry heart. Therefore see to it that, in this matter, your heart and your mouth accord, and of that must I have full surety before to-morrow's dawn, for, else, I shall deem all your fair speeches to be but lies, Sir Launcelot, and then shall my dealing be short and quick ; for wit you well that this dame of thine is here, in this Court, unbidden, and of me she hath scant welcome."

With that she rose and stood before him so fierce as any lion ; and then, while he sought this way and that for words with which to stint her fierceness, she departed suddenly and went from him.

Now, at all this which passed between the Queen and Sir Launcelot, and that too in the sight of all men, it is not to be denied but that the lady Elaine was very greatly cast down, for she held that she had been shamed before the whole Court, and so, inwardly, she made great secret sorrow and, outwardly, she wept not a little. When, therefore, Sir Launcelot saw this, how that for very shame and sorrow she lifted not her eyes from the board, but sat as one in a dream and with her eyes bemused with tears, then his heart smote him very greatly because of the uncourteous manner of his greeting to her that day, and he said within himself :

“ When these others are bestowed within their several chambers, then will I softly to my lady Elaine, and, when I have told her in plain words how that I deemed that, through witchcraft, another had taken her shape, then will she surely pardon me my discourtesy.”

Thus, then, it fell out that, when all those others were fast on sleep, Sir Launcelot crept forth from his chamber into the dark eftures of the palace, and so made softly to where the lady Elaine was lodged. Here, at the door of her chamber, he paused a while, and then, on a sudden resolve, passed within and fastened the door behind him with the bolt.

Now, all this while, the Queen lay awake in her bed, tossing to and fro in great misease, and turning over in her mind all that had passed that night between her and Sir Launcelot. So she lay for the space of an hour or more and then, so hot was the burning of her heart, that she leapt lightly from her bed and passed out of her chamber into the efture that was beyond. Here she raged up and down for a while as one out of her mind, and then, by chance, as she so traversed to and fro, her eyes lighted upon the door of Sir Launcelot's chamber, and she saw that it stood open. Now, when she saw this, the Queen, I wot, was wood-mad as any wolf whose whelps have been reft from her, for full well she wist now where Sir Launcelot was ; and so she ran with all the speed she might to where the lady Elaine was lodged and there thrust at the door with all her strength, but it would not yield ; whereupon she beat upon it with her hands and cried aloud to those within to open.

Now, when those two heard this beating upon the door, Sir Launcelot said within himself :

"If the Queen find me here, then will it go passing ill with my fair lady."

So to the lady Elaine he said :

"Be not so hardy as to keep the lady Gueneviere without but loose the bolt quickly, else will she surely deem that we have been together."

Wherewith he straightway turned him about and leaped forth out of the window, not heeding where he lit, and so, by evil chance, he lighted in the midst of a bramble bush that grew beneath the window, whereof he was very sorely scratched and torn, for he had on no more than his night-dress. Howbeit of his hurt he took no heed but ran as fast as he might into the darkness of the night.

While thus he did, the lady Elaine, so soon as she saw that he was departed, ran to the door and drew back the bolt, whereupon the Queen rushed hotly in and looked here and there about the chamber, as a greyhound looks for a coney in the forest. So, anon, her eyes lighted on the open window, and then she ran to it and, thrusting forth her head, looked below.

Now it had so fortun'd, by evil chance, that, as Sir Launcelot lighted on to the ground, his night-dress had been caught upon the thorns of the bramble bush into which he leaped, and, as he sped away, a long strip from it there remained and so floated in the moonlight, white and gleaming and plainly to be seen, and on this white strip the Queen's eye quickly lit.

"So, my lady Elaine," said she, so soon as she might speak for anger, "it is in this wise that you bear yourself with my knights !"

"Madam," said she, "he is my husband."

"Husband forsooth !" cried the Queen, as shrill as any seagull on the shore, "and, so you be his wife, how comes it then that you have loosed him from your side this two years past and made no sign ? Why made you no sign when we sat at dinner in the hall this night, nor so much as raised your eyes to his face ? Is that the part of a true wife or of an honest dame ? Nay, but, with eyes like a nun, you sat there hatching villainies in your heart, and then, when honest folk sleep, you two must needs creep together like common ill-doers of the kennel. Fie upon thee, for a shameless trull !"

"Madam," said she mildly, "there hath been no villainy, nor aught of which we need feel shame."

"Shame!" cried the Queen, whose anger waxed but hotter at the meekness of the other, "what wottest thou of shame, thou milk-faced wench? For what cause hast thou crept hither to my Court but to work mischief with my knights? and that, trust thou well, I will by no means endure. Had I a weapon to my hand, I would slay thee as I would a rat. Therefore, on pain of thy life, lady Elaine, take heed that thou avoid my Court before to-morrow's sun, for, by the faith I owe to God, I will surely slay thee when the means are to my hand."

Therewith she turned her about and departed, as one out of her mind.

Then, so soon as she was gone, the lady Elaine cast about here and there in her mind how she had best deal, for very sure was she that, if Sir Launcelot bade her stay, then would she stay maugre the Queen and all her threatenings, for liefer a hundred times would she be slain by the Queen's hand than go contrary to her lord's will. So she wist not what to do, and, while she was thus debating in her mind, she fell on sleep.

Now turn we to Sir Launcelot, who, wit you well, had but a sorry welcome of that bramble bush in which he lighted. Howbeit, for all the hurts he had, he made no long tarrying in that field, but ran as fast as he might to the stables without the palace, where his horses and squires were lodged. There, when he was so far come, he cast pebbles at the window, till Haviland and Wilfran thrust forth their heads to learn what it was that thus broke their peace in the still hours of the night; and there, in the street, they beheld Sir Launcelot standing naked but for his night-shirt, whereat they marvelled very greatly. So, when they had opened to him, they saw that he was bleeding from many sore hurts, which Haviland would have salved with soft ointments, but of that Sir Launcelot would not, for other matters there were toward.

Thus, so soon as he had recovered his breath, for he had run fast and far, he bade Haviland make ready his own horse and the lady Elaine's palfrey, and, so soon as it was light, bring word by some means to the lady Elaine that she should make no tarrying but set forth for the Castle of Corbin as quickly as she might, for full well wist he that, for that night's work, she would have but scant welcome of the Queen. So then he made them both to swear that they would by no

manner of means betray him, and, when to this they readily assented, he clothed him in a shirt and breeches that were Wilfran's, and with a staff in his hand and two loaves slung across his shoulders in a net, he set forth on foot into the night.

CHAPTER XVIII

How King Arthur Sent Forth Twenty Knights for to Seek Sir Launcelot

NEVER, I wot, had so great an outcry been heard as there was within the palace at Camelot on the morning next following, when the noise went abroad that, in the night, both Sir Launcelot and the lady Elaine had departed, no man knew whither. So, by the King's command, men ran hither and thither about the country seeking tidings of all they met whether they had seen aught of that noble knight and his lady, and, soon, it was in all men's mouths that the lady Elaine had ridden forth at prime, with Haviland in her company, but with no knight at her side. Then was there hue and cry in all the country round for Sir Launcelot ; but of him no man that was questioned wist anything, nor could any understand where he might be, for in the stables were his two horses and in the palace was all his armour and in the Round Hall hung his shield with the three crowned lions upon it, but of the knight himself there was no sign within or without.

At this the King made such sorrow as none had seen the like of before, and bade send for the porter of the gate.

"Fellow," said he, "say what you know and speak sooth, or your head shall pay forfeit."

"My lord," said he, "full little can I say but that the lady Elaine rode forth at prime with Haviland only in her company, but as for my lord, Sir Launcelot, he hath not gone forth through the gateway either riding or on foot."

So then King Arthur questioned him further and, when he was pushed thereto, he told King Arthur plainly how that, at the time that she had ridden into the palace, Sir Launcelot had reviled the lady Elaine as one out of his mind, which was hardly to be believed in so courteous a knight. So, upon this, the bruit went abroad that Sir Launcelot was surely mad, and that, in his madness, he had fled naked into the night ; and so, when all men were persuaded that this was so, the King must needs send prickors to east and west and north and

south, and these were charged that they should spare no spending so only they might find him ; but, within a while, all of these came back to Camelot bare of tidings. But one who had ridden to Basing, came back and told how that many had seen the lady Elaine and Haviland pass by, but Sir Launcelot no man whom he questioned had seen, nor, indeed any naked man of goodly shape and knightly bearing running wild in the wilderness.

Thus, when two days and nights has passed and yet there came no tidings, then indeed were all men fully persuaded that Sir Launcelot had in truth gone mad, for why, as they said, should any, if he were not mad, flee thus naked and unarmed into the wilderness ?

While all men were thus debating in their minds whether Sir Launcelot were truly mad or not, there rode, upon a day, into Camelot the three elder sons of Lot ; and, of these three, Sir Agravaine and Sir Gaheris, when they learned of the tumult that had arisen in the matter of Sir Launcelot, spoke privily together for a while, and then those two went to the King and, when they had come to where he was, Sir Agravaine said :

“ My lord, King Arthur, in this matter of Sir Launcelot, it appeareth manifest to my brother, Sir Gaheris, and to me, for what cause Sir Launcelot hath thus fled the Court and left no word of his going.”

“ Well,” said the King, “ so you have any tidings of that most noble knight, I pray you keep it not from me, for, so only we may recover him, I care not what may be the means.”

Thereupon Sir Agravaine looked to this hand and to that, as though in dread that some might overhear him, and then he said :

“ Mine uncle and liege lord, be it known unto you that, as the knights of the Round Table sat in the great hall at Mameceaster, on the night of the day on which Sir Launcelot slew Sir Gambrail, he and my lady Gueneviere drew apart into an inner chamber, over the doorway of which hung a velvet curtain. Then, within a while, my brother Sir Gaheris and I, thinking no evil, pulled aside the curtain and looked within, and there we saw that which it was not fitting that we should see.”

Now, when he heard these words, the face of the King grew black with wrath and his hands gripped the elbows of the chair whereon he sat so that they cracked beneath his fingers.

"Now, by Jesu!" he said, "there is here some villainy afoot."

"So it would seem," said Sir Gaheris, "else had Sir Launcelot not fled at the bruit of our coming."

"Full well wist he," said Sir Agravaine, "that, in honour, we might not withhold this from you."

So, for a while, the King sat in silence, for so great was his anger that he might not find words to speak, whereupon those two knights, deeming that they had done all that they might, would have departed privily, but the King called them back.

"My nephews both," said he, "to me it is very manifest that, in this matter ye be either fools or knaves; for why because of the bruit of your coming, should Sir Launcelot go forth naked and unarmed into the wilderness? Three days hath he been gone and ye be but now ridden in."

"Sir," said Sir Agravaine, "he knew not the hour of our coming, and so fled at the first noise of it."

"But wherefore naked and unarmed? What hindered him, within these three days, to arm himself and ride forth as a noble knight should?"

Then, when those two made no answer, for in truth they knew not what to say, he said:

"Saw any other this shameful sight?"

"Mine uncle," said Sir Agravaine, "my brother, Sir Gawaine, saw it."

"Ah!" said the King, "Gawaine saw it, and yet he held it from me!"

Therewith he smote upon a bell that stood beside him, and, when a page came running, he said:

"Go seek my lord, Sir Gawaine, and bid him hither."

So the page made haste to depart, and, when he was gone from them, the King said:

"Fair nephews, how came it that ye thought fit to spy upon the comings and goings of my lady Queen?"

"Our aunt Morgan le Fay bade us look," said Sir Agravaine; "we wist not so much as what it was that she would have us see, till we had placed our eyes to the curtain."

"Now, by my head!" said King Arthur, "this smells of treason; for, where Morgan le Fay intermits her, then mischief to me and mine is ever close at hand."

Even as he so spoke, Sir Gawaine burst in upon them, even as a wild boar bursts from the forest upon the hunters, for such was ever his way.

"My fair nephew," said the King, "here is a matter as to which I charge you that you depart in no wise from the truth; and the matter is this: when you were all gathered together in the great hall at Mameceaster, in the harvest time, did Queen Morgan le Fay bid you look beyond a velvet curtain that hung across a doorway?"

"In very sooth did she," he said.

"And what saw ye?" said the King. So then Sir Gawaine held silence for a long while, for he understood plainly that here was some weighty matter to hand, and within himself he said:

"This is some villainy of my two brothers." So, presently, he said to the King:

"Sir, wit you well that I saw my lord, Sir Launcelot, and the lady Gueneviere there seated on settles, one on either side of the hearth, debating it would seem of some weighty matter."

Thereupon there fell upon all those four a long silence, and, in the end, the King said:

"Sir Agravaine and Sir Gaheris, out of the mouth of your brother are ye adjudged liars and traitors against the Queen and against the most noble and honourable knight of the world, and, but for the blood that is between us, I would have the both of you to be hanged on the common gibbet in the market-place. Howbeit full well wot I that Queen Morgan le Fay, as all men say, can by her sorceries make men to see that which she would have them see, whether it be true or otherwise, and, inasmuch as she hateth me out of all measure, and would mischief me by any and all means, I dare truly undertake that, in her despite of me, she made you to see that which you thought you saw, for her own evil ends. For this cause, then, and because of the blood that is between us, will I spare you, but, wit ye well, my two nephews, that, from this day on for a twelvemonth, ye are once again banished this my Court on pain of your lives. So now get you hence before my mood hardens, for, by Jesu! I would gladly see you both dead."

With that he looked upon them so fiercely that they made haste to depart, for in truth they were afraid. So, when they were departed, King Arthur turned to Sir Gawaine and said:

"Fair my nephew, what make you of this present matter of Sir Launcelot?"

"My lord and uncle," said he, "to me it seemeth plain

that some madness hath overtaken Sir Launcelot, else had he surely not gone forth naked and unarmed."

"Of that am I ensured," said the King, "and therefore am I at some misease, for, wit you well that, being, as he is, naked and unarmed, this noble knight runneth great peril at the hands of robbers and knaves; for, how good soever of his hands a knight may be, it availeth him but little against armed robbers when he be naked."

"Ye speak sooth indeed," said Sir Gawaine.

"Therefore," said the King, "am I fully resolved to recover this most noble knight by any means that may be mine; and, to this end, will I to-morn send forth twoscore chosen knights of our Round Table fellowship for to search all the four corners of the realm till they find Sir Launcelot, even though they be gone upon this quest for a twelvemonth; and to him that bringeth him back whole in body shall be given a fair castle and many broad lands; for liefer would I suffer my right hand to be hewn from my arm than that ill should befall so noble a knight as he."

"Well spoken, mine uncle," said he, "and, as for me, before the sun has risen a hand's-breadth in the sky, I will be hot-foot on this quest, nor, by the faith I owe to Christ, shall you see my face again until such time as Sir Launcelot shall be with me."

Wherewith he rushed from the room as a bratchet on the trace of a hart, for thus it ever was with Sir Gawaine, in all that he did, to be hot and eager as a wild boar; and therefore it was that, for all his ill-deeds, men loved him passing well, for, though he was savage as a wounded lion, and inconstant in love as the wind, yet was he as brave as any that lived and as faithful to men as he was faithless to ladies.

So straightway went forth the King's decree, and, on the day next following, twoscore knights rode forth from Camelot upon the King's quest, for to search the realm, long and broad, till they had found Sir Launcelot. And the realm was apportioned to them for their quest in the manner following: Northumbria to Sir Bors, Listinois to Sir Gawaine, Cameliard to Sir Gareth, North Galis to Sir Ewen, South Galis to Sir Plenorius, South Gore to Sir Meliogrance, North Gore to Sir Dinadan, Surluse to Sir Brennor, Cornwall to Sir Pelleas, Sessoins to Sir Sagramor, Kent to Sir Branadil, Essex to Sir Meliot, Benois to Sir Bellangere, while to the Kingdom of Logris were appointed Sir Launcelot's kinsmen, Sir Lionel,

Sir Hector, Sir Blamor, and Sir Bleboris ; and to the North road the three brethren Sir Palomides, Sir Segwarides, and Sir Safere.

So, when these twenty knights were all assembled in the courtelage of the palace, the King and Queen came before them, standing on the high daïs, and then the King said on high before them all :

“ Fair lords and fellows of the Table Round, I send you forth this day on such a quest as, for worthiness, hath never yet been seen or heard, for the knight of most worship and renown amongst us all hath gone forth into the wilderness naked and unarmed, and so at the mercy of all evil-doers. Now, therefore, go ye forth, my good and trusty knights, and bring him again safe, an ye so may, to this our Court ; and to him that bringeth him hither whole in body will I ensure a full fair castle and many wide lands. And, furthermore, I charge you all that ye return not hither within the space of twelve months, unless that Sir Launcelot be with you, and so God speed you all.”

Therewith the King and Queen and all those twoscore knights passed down through Camelot to St. Stephen's Church, and there they heard Mass, and, when they had so done, they departed, each as it had been appointed him.

CHAPTER XIX

How Sir Launcelot Fell in with Bandits and Became Sir Dulac

WHILE thus the hue and cry for Sir Launcelot was being made full hotly throughout the realm, he himself sped northward, through the Warwell Woods, ever shunning the highways and keeping well within the shadow of the forest, so long as it was day, for full well wist he of the hue and cry that men would make after him. To such good purpose did he use his legs that—while it was yet dark—he had crossed the bridge at Vagon and once more found shelter from prying eyes in the forests beyond. There, for many hours, he slept.

So, for two days, he walked all he might and, for two more nights, he slept on the moss beneath the forest trees, and then, on the third day, his loaves were finished. So he drew tight his belt and abated nothing of his speed, because of his set purpose. And once he passed an abbey, but feared to enter therein lest he should be known, and therefore passed it by. Then, at last, when he could scarce keep his feet for hunger and faintness, on a sudden, he became aware of a troop of horsemen that came hard after him through the forest. At first he weened that they had been the King's men, but, presently, as they drew nearer, he saw very plainly that they were but a band of robbers. Eleven of them there were in all, and, in the forefront, rode two big knights, in goodly armour and well-fashioned, of whom one bestrode a black horse and the other a white. On the shield of him that rode the black horse was a bull's head, and on the shield of the other a wolf's head. Behind these two knights rode nine spearmen, who led by halters seven other horses, bearing armour and food and wine; and one there was across whose back was slung the carcase of a deer, newly slain.

Now, when these robbers espied Sir Launcelot, two of them, at the bidding of their lords, thrust forward and seized him by the two shoulders, one on either hand, and so brought him to where those two knights sat their horses.

"Whom have we here?" cried he who bore the bull's head. "Search him, fellows, whether he beareth any letter or no. It may well be that the knave is a messenger from Camelot."

But, when they had searched him, "My lord," they said, "there is no letter upon him, and, in truth, he seemeth but an ill-furnished vagabond, having neither scrip nor wallet."

"Then have I a mind to hang him for his neediness," said Bull's Head. "Therefore, fellow, say if thou knowest any good cause why I should not hang thee."

"None," said he, "but that I might serve thee better living than dead."

"By my head! that is not spoken amiss," said Wolf's Head, "canst sit a horse, fellow?"

"Aye, passably well," said he.

"What is thy trade?" they asked.

"I have no trade," said he, "for thereunto was I never apprenticed."

"Then, of a very surety, thou art a rogue," said Wolf's Head, "for men live either meagrely by their own trade or fatly by that of others; and, inasmuch as thou hast no trade, then must thou, perforce, get thy sustenance by that of others, and therefore art thou a rogue and the better fitted to our brotherhood. Hast a name fellow?"

"Aye," said he, "the name of Dulac."

Now, in this, Sir Launcelot spoke no more than the truth, for never in his speech would he wittingly depart therefrom, for so to do, as it seemed to him, was ever the part of a coward.

"Well then, Dulac," said Bull's Head, "seeing that thou canst be but of scant service to us unarmed, we must perforce put upon thy churl shoulders the armour of a good dead knight, for we have none other ready to hand, and armed thou must needs be. So choose thou that which is nearest to thy shape and get thy villain body within it as quickly as may be, for we have far to travel yet and the day wanes."

Now, at these words, Sir Launcelot's heart leaped wildly within him, for he espied, upon one of those horses that were led, some armour of rare workmanship and bigly made. This then he made short and quick choice of, and so, within a while, with two of the robbers playing the squire, he had this harness laced upon him, and by his side a good sword and on his shoulders a black shield with five white stars thereon. Then he leaped lightly upon the back of the horse that had borne the armour—a fair bay courser—and so was he fully arrayed.

Now, when he so saw this churl, that they had by chance lighted upon, in the guise of an armed knight, Bull's Head laughed in great glee.

"Jesu!" said he, "how aptly doth the churl counterfeit the true knight! Who, looking on so goodly a shell, would ween that within lies but a rotten core? Now, fellow, get you to your place and look to your manners or I may yet hang you, for all your borrowed trappings."

So, through the forest, that little band pressed on, ever heading northward, and, as they rode, a rough fellow with but one eye kept continually at the side of the churl who bore the knight's armour, talking without cease of this matter and of that, as men do whose thoughts are idle. Rare leaders, said he, were Sir Tauleas and Sir Fallodin, for none who rode with them need ever lack for meat and ale, or for a good horse between his shanks. Had they not, even that very day, slain three knights as they sat unarmed beside a well, and got from them all manner of victual and wine and good horses and armour to boot?"

"Ah!" said Dulac, "would to God that I had been there."

"Aye," said the fellow, reading his words amiss, "it was in truth merry sport. We had them all spitted or ever they gained their feet, one by Sir Tauleas, one by Sir Fallodin—that was he whose harness you bear—and one by Cuthbert. Thereupon their three squires, seeing their lords fall and having much sorrow to get their horses, which were at pasture, fled into the trees on foot, as conies flee before a greyhound, but, or they had gone a stone's throw, we had them all three spitted, for one I slew and the other two were slain by Ambrose and Gunton. Howbeit, Cuthbert pressed me somewhat hard for the back of my knave. Thus are we seven horses the richer—for one they had that bore meat and wine—and three good suits of armour to boot."

Thereupon the fellow laughed, as at that which pleased his memory, but he to whom the tale was told did not laugh, for, wit you well, his thoughts were wide of laughter.

"And how art thou named, my friend?" he said.

"My name is Flanwin," said the other; and this name Dulac bore in mind, and so too the names of those other three.

Thus they rode for two days, and, on the third day, about the hour of noon, they became aware of a knight, bearing a blue and white bended shield, that followed hard upon them. Behind the knight there rode a squire that carried three spears.

So this knight rode as hard as he might drive till he had them overtaken, and then, as his eyes fell upon Dulac and upon the shield that he bore upon his shoulder, he cried out in a great voice: "How now, traitor and villain! Well be ye found, for now wot I of a surety who it was that foully did to death my brother, the noble knight, Sir Oswald. Keep thee from me, villain, for here and now either thou or I must die."

Now, when the knight had so spoken, those two bandit lords were like to have quit their saddles with laughter, for they rocked to and fro as men who have much drunken.

"Ha, ha, Sir Dulac!" cried Sir Tauleas, "now may you in truth win your spurs. Get you a spear, most noble knight, and see to it that you bear you well and knightly and shame not our company."

Whereupon they all laughed anew in great merriment, but the knight with the blue and white bended shield laughed not, for he was as one out of his mind with anger.

"My lords," said he, "ye may laugh, an ye so will, but wit you well that, here, either this false knight or I must die, for most foully hath he gotten him the shield and armour of my most noble brother, Sir Oswald."

"How know you, Sir Knight, that I wrought foully by your brother?" Dulac asked.

"Did I not even now find his body lying beside the well unarmed and pierced with a spear from behind?" said that knight. "Did not that foul wound bear open witness to your villainy? Therefore I require thee, so thou art not wholly shameless, that thou cease thy talking and make thee ready for battle, for—think not the contrary—I shall full soon have that armour from thee again."

"I have no spear," said Dulac.

"My squire beareth three," said he, "so choose any that thou wilt and make thee ready."

Then, once again, Sir Tauleas and Sir Fallodin laughed as though they might never cease, and Sir Tauleas cried out:

"Aye, get thee thy spear, Sir Dulac, and show us of thy mettle. I make little doubt but that thou wilt bear thee full knightly."

So Dulac turned his horse and made back to where the squire sat alone and, as he passed the stranger knight, he said so that none might hear but he:

"Sir Knight, so thou wouldst learn of how thy brother was

slain, I pray thee ride with me a little, for, as Christ be my Saviour, I had no part therein."

Thereupon that knight said no word but turned his horse and rode with Dulac to where the squire sat his horse and, as they rode, Dulac said :

"Wit ye well, Sir Knight, that it was not I who slew thy brother, but those two caitiff knights, yonder, whom I hate as honestly as ever canst thou. So now, so you will make common cause with me, I promise you that we will overbear those two knights and slay them, and so rid the earth of two very evil villains."

Then that knight said :

"Sir, how may I know whether you speak sooth or no ? "

"By this may ye know it," said Dulac, and so drew forth from his shirt the golden cross round the foot of which coiled the red dragon.

"Now God be praised," said the knight, "for now I know that ye be of the Round Table and therefore a true knight."

"Now," said Dulac, "longer we may not here tarry, lest they have suspicion unto us ; therefore take thou him with a wolf's head, for he it was who slew thy brother, and I will have ado with Bull's Head, for he is the bigger of the twain."

Now, while they thus spoke together, Dulac made pretence to make trial of the spears, balancing first this one in his hand and then that, whereat the two bandit knights chafed hotly, for they deemed that he did but seek to eschew the battle that was toward. So, in the end, Sir Tauleas cried out :

"Cease thy talking and parleying, thou churl knight, and dress thee to the battle, or we shall hold thee craven."

"Craven am I not, Sir Tauleas, as thou shalt quickly learn to thy great sorrow," said he ; "but, as for thee, thou art a bandit and a destroyer of good knights, as, God willing, I shall now prove upon thy villain body ; so keep thou from me, as best thou canst."

Now, at these words, the two bandit knights gaped so that they were like to have fallen from their saddles, for they deemed that their vagabond had gone clean out of his mind. Then, when they were in some part recovered, Sir Tauleas cried out :

"By God's head ! thou villain churl, thou shalt hang from the nearest tree for this, and that before the shadows shall have lengthened by a shaftmon. Seize him, ye fellows, and bind his hands."

Howbeit further words he spake not, for even while he was yet speaking, Dulac bore down on him like a tempest and hurled him headlong from his horse. So too bore down the blue and white knight upon Sir Fallodin, but, with a strong buffet, that bandit knight bore him to the ground, and so would have slain him as he lay upon the ground, but, even as he made to thrust with his spear, Dulac turned his horse and overthrew him beside the other. Then Dulac and the other knight lit them down from their horses and, when Sir Tauleas and Sir Fallodin had got them to their feet, they lashed at them with their swords full fiercely, as indeed they needs must, for both these bandits were good men of their hands, and big and strong. And so it was that, within a while, the stranger knight was sore put to it to keep his head from Sir Fallodin's sword and so cried out aloud. Thereupon, when he heard that cry, Dulac leaped upon Sir Tauleas so fiercely that he first beat him to his knees and then with a great stroke, smote him clean through the helm to the chin, so that he fell down dead at his feet. Then, when he saw that he was dead, he leaped lightly betwixt the other two and cried out :

"Now is this my battle, Sir Stranger ; therefore avoid thee quickly, for never shall it be said that this knight was bested by the two of us at once."

So, when he heard these words, the stranger knight withdrew him, nothing loth, for in truth all the breath had gone from his body ; and, thereupon, when he was gone, Dulac leaped upon Sir Fallodin and dealt him such buffets and so fast as no man would believe but he had seen them, so that, within a while, he fell to the ground in a swoon sore wounded.

"Now make an end, an you so will," said Dulac, "for he it was who foully slew your brother."

With that he turned on his heel and went to where Sir Tauleas lay, and then he saw that he was indeed dead, for his head gaped so that it was but held together by the helm, and, when he had made an end of looking, Sir Fallodin was likewise dead, for the stranger knight had unlaced his helm and smitten off his head.

Now, while these knights so fought with the bandit lords, the nine spearmen that were robbers sat their horses like men amazed, for not one among them was there but held the belief that this Dulac, whom they had chanced upon in the shape of a vagrant, was in truth some mighty wizard, who had overcome their two lords by his enchantments ; so, fearing for

themselves, they lit down from their horses and fell prone on their faces upon the ground. So, as they there knelt groveling, with their faces to the ground, Dulac came before them and said :

" Which of you is there that would take service with me ? " Whereupon, with one accord, they raised their heads and prayed that they might all serve him.

" Get you then to your feet," said he, " and bring before me for judgment those four who are named Flanwin, Cuthbert, Ambrose, and Gunton."

Then, when those four stood before him trembling, he said :

" Ye scurvy knaves and villains, out of your own mouths are ye condemned in that ye most evilly robbed and slew unarmed men, and for this your lives be forfeit. Howbeit, seeing that you were under the rule of those two dead knights of evil memory, and that you dealt in some part as they bade you, I will as at this time spare your lives."

So he bade those other five strip them to their shirts and scourge them with ropes, and then they drove them forth into the forest. When this was done and they had stripped the armour from the two dead knights, they rested them for a while beneath the trees and ate and drank, and, thereafter, Dulac got him upon Sir Tauleas's horse, which was a full noble courser, and they turned them northward once again. Then, as they made them ready to depart, came the stranger knight to them and said :

" Sir Dulac, wit you well that, in this matter, I am beholden to you out of all measure, for you have both slain the knight who slew my brother and also have you saved my own life, for full well wot I that, but for your intermittance, I was no more than a dead man. Therefore, fair sir, my life is yours to dispose of as you will, and such service as you may require of me, that will I faithfully fulfil as best I may. And now, sir, I would have you know that I am named Sir Gileas, and I am from the country of Surluse, and son to the good knight, Sir Plenorius ; but as yet I have but little skill in arms, having in truth seen no more than one and twenty summers."

" Well be you met, Sir Gileas," said the other, " for your father is known to me as a right noble knight, and so hath ever been. And, for any such service as I may have done, wit you well that you owe me no thanks, for that which I did I would have done for any man, so he were honourable and true. But, so you would truly serve me, Sir Gileas, I pray

you let it be in this wise : that you ride with me a little on my way ; for I promise you that I have but scant joy of the fellowship of these five villain knaves that call me lord."

"As for that," said Sir Gileas, "trust thou well, sir, that I would follow thee to the world's end."

"Then are we both content," said Dulac, "for I may not hide from thee, Sir Gileas, that I am right glad of thy fellowship."

Thus then they rode for a space in silence, and then said Sir Gileas :

"Fair sir, it marvelleth me greatly that the fame of thy name doth not ring far and wide throughout this realm, for such deeds of arms as mine eyes have seen this day could surely not be matched by any knight that liveth, if it were not Sir Launcelot."

"You overpraise me," said Dulac, "for wit you well, Sir Gileas, that those two bandit knights were gross and short-winded, and a winded man is but as a child against one that is well-breathed."

"Howbeit, Sir Dulac," said he, "very sure am I that no mortal man, that ever I have seen bear arms, could have withstood your might this day ; and wit you well that I have, or now, seen Sir Tristram joust in the tourney at Roche Dure, when he overthrew one and twenty knights and bore away the prize, as indeed he ever doth wheresoever he contendeth ; for no man hath yet been found able to withstand him, only Sir Launcelot, and he hath ever put him to the worse when that those two have encountered."

"Truly," said the other, "Sir Tristram is as good a knight as any that liveth, and any that overcometh him doth so more by good fortune than by might."

So, for a while, they rode in silence, and then Sir Gileas said :

"Hath it ever so fortun'd, Sir Dulac, that you and Sir Tristram have encountered ?"

"In good sooth it hath," said he, "and so can I bear ready witness to his might."

"And which of you twain had the advantage ?" said he.

"Fair sir," said Dulac, "wit you well that, where two knights encounter, it may not readily be said that such a one hath the advantage or the other, for, when many knights press hither and thither in a tourney, no man rightly knoweth whether he hath the advantage or the contrary. But this

much I wot full well : that either of us gave other many sad strokes."

Whereat he laughed lightly, but Sir Gileas laughed not, for his face was as that of one who sees hidden things and yet but half sees them. So once again he spoke.

"*Certes*, Sir Dulac," he said, "as it seemeth to me, a knight may have no surety that he hath put his adversary to the worse ; but if he be himself overborne or put from his saddle, of that he must have full certainty. Therefore, sir, I prithee tell me, did Sir Tristram put you from your horse when you two encountered ?"

"Nay," said he, "he had not by that much the advantage."

"Now, by the faith of my body !" cried Sir Gileas, "I marvel no longer, for, so you were not overthrown by Sir Tristram, then can you be none other than Sir Launcelot himself, for he alone hath ever withstood him."

"Well, then," said he, "an it so please you, I am Sir Launcelot du Lac, and therefore bore I no false name."

"Sir," said Sir Gileas, "trust thou well that of this I have had some certainty from such time as I first saw you overthrow those two big knights ; for full well wist I that no man that beareth life could deal such strokes as then I saw, unless it were Sir Launcelot du Lac."

"Sir," said Sir Launcelot, "you overpraise me, and, trust thou well, Sir Gileas, and forget it not, that for the praise of men I have no great stomach, for I am as God made me, and that which I do owes me no merit but to Him only."

"Well," said Sir Gileas, "that is not to be denied. Howbeit, if no man sought worship for its own sake, then were knighthood but an empty name indeed."

"Worship we must truly seek," said Sir Launcelot, "so it be worthily won, for thereto are we sworn ; but with the deed itself should we rest content, and not aim at the empty praise of men. And now, sir, I require you, as you are a true knight, that you make known to no man that lives who I be, nor never name me as I am."

"As for that," said Sir Gileas, "I will readily ensure you, but, an you would hide your name, Sir Launcelot, you must needs eschew all jousts and battles, for your sword proclaims your name louder than any tongue."

"Trust thou well," said he, "that I have little mind to do present battle with any, for, as at this time, I am riding privily and on a secret adventure. Howbeit, I may not,

because of my vow, hold me back from the overthrow of tyrants and the succour of distressed damsels, should such come in my path, for thereto are we of the Round Table sworn."

So rode those two till nightfall in great contentment each with other, and then they slept under the trees.

CHAPTER XX

How Sir Launcelot and Sir Gileas Rode to Bedegraine

NOW, on the evening of the second day after that Sir Launcelot had overthrown those two bandit knights, he and Sir Gileas came to the entry of a great forest, which was named Sherwood Forest, and there beneath the trees they slept that night, for the weather was fair. And then, on the morn, about the hour of undorne, having broken their fast, those two knights, with their six men-at-arms behind them, set forth through the forest, riding northwards. Presently, as they rode, they espied a knight that pricked towards them from the west. Now, while he was yet some way distant—the sun being at that time full upon him—Sir Launcelot saw very plainly that this knight bore a green shield on which was a white lion, and from that he knew him to be Sir Safere, who was brother to Sir Palomides. Thereat he had great dread to be discovered, and so he turned him to Sir Gileas and said :

“ Now, fair sir, mayest thou make proof of thy goodwill to me ward, for yonder cometh Sir Safere seeking, I make little doubt, some tidings of me. Ride thou then, I pray you, to meet him and, by any means that you may use with honour, see to it that he draweth not nearer nor gaineth any speech with me, for so were I undone indeed ! ”

Right glad, I ween, was Sir Gileas to do Sir Launcelot's bidding, and so, as quickly as he might, he pressed forward and saluted Sir Safere, and he him.

“ God save you, sir,” said he. “ What seek you in these marches ? ”

“ Fair sir,” said Sir Safere, “ I am upon the strangest quest that ever man heard speak of, for I seek the most noble knight of all the world, who wanders in the wilderness wood-mad and naked. Hath any such crossed thy path ? ”

“ Nay,” said he, “ I have seen none such.”

“ Sir,” said Sir Safere, “ I require you that you tell me your name.”

“ Right gladly,” said he, “ will I tell you my name, for I

am named Sir Gileas, and yonder is my brother, Sir Oswald, and we be both sons to the good knight Sir Plenorius de Surluse ; and now are we making for the Abbey of Belle Aventure, where, God willing, we shall find harbourage to-night."

" Alas ! " said he, " that I may not be of your company, for within that abbey are good monks, and well-disposed toward all true knights ; but the nature of my quest is that I may not sleep beneath a roof till I have found this wandering knight ; so God thee bless, Sir Gileas, and fare thee well."

Therewith he saluted Sir Gileas and turned him back into the forest, and Sir Gileas, with great joy in his heart that he had in this wise served Sir Launcelot, rode back to where he sat, for better concealment, within the deep shadow of the trees.

" Sir," said he, " all sped as you would have had it, for, when Sir Safere asked me for tidings of a wandering knight that went naked through the forest, I told him, in honest sooth, that I had seen none such."

" And of me did he take no heed ? " said Sir Launcelot.

" Sir," said Sir Gileas, " I will not hide from you that he espied you where you hove beneath the trees, but, when I said that you were Sir Oswald, my brother, he seemed well content and so rode away."

" For that," said Sir Launcelot, " I thank you, and, seeing that by the laws of our fellowship we may bear names other than our own, where our quest so requireth, it were best that, for a while, I bear the name of Sir Oswald. Therefore, Sir Gileas, I would pray you so to name me at all times in our speech each with other, so that, should any enquire of you unawares, you may so name me from usage thereto."

So thus it was agreed between them, and, that evening, about the hour of vespers, they came to the Abbey of Belle Aventure and there sought lodging for the night ; but by no means would the five bandit horsemen that rode with them enter within the abbey, for, because of their evil ways, they feared the holy men. So Sir Launcelot and Sir Gileas took their horses from them and sent them on their way. Right good cheer, I warrant you, did the monks make those two knights that night, and, on the morn, at prime, when they had heard Mass and broken their fast, Sir Launcelot and Sir Gileas set forth once more upon their journey, with the squire leading behind them a void horse which bore their food and

wine. So, as they were about to depart, Sir Launcelot turned to the monks and said :

“ Fair sirs, for your great courtesy to us ward and for the good cheer that you have made purvey for us, I pray you to take of our horses such six as you may choose for the service of the abbey ; and the others, with the armour that they bear, I pray you to have in your safe keeping till such time as I may return, and so God you bless.”

With which words he made to depart, and so those two knights went on their way with light hearts, for gladness was in their blood and the morning was fair as any that a man may see.

So they rode for a league or so as blithely as any men may, and then, as they rode, they became aware of many folk that passed along upon the same road, some on horses and some on their feet, but all with their faces set the one way. And, anon, there were knights in armour, with their squires, that joined in the throng, so that Sir Launcelot and Sir Gileas marvelled very greatly what it might all mean. So, at the last, Sir Gileas bade his squire ask some of them that they overtook what signified this throng and for what cause they all pushed along upon the same road. So then they told the squire that a great tourney had been cried for that day at the Castle of Bedegraine, to which all these folk were now pressing, for such was the nature of the tourney that no man would willingly be from it, so he had two good legs wherewith to walk.

Now, when the squire had brought them word of this, Sir Gileas was passing glad, for this seemed to have fallen out as he would have had it, so he turned unto Sir Launcelot and said :

“ Sir, will you not break a spear at these jousts for the honour of the Round Table ? ” for he had great will to see Sir Launcelot in the lists.

“ Sir,” said Sir Launcelot, “ of this you must in truth hold me excused, for full loth am I, as at this time, to do that which may bring the eyes of men upon me. Howbeit, we may well mingle with the throng and see that which we may see from the backs of our good horses, for there be none here that will heed me in your brother’s harness, and with his shield upon my back.”

“ That is true,” said Sir Gileas, “ for here are we far from my country of Surluse.”

So those two rode onward towards the castle, following whither the throng led them for another league or so, and, anon, about the hour of undorne, suddenly they came upon the castle, which was built high and strong upon a cliff above the River Trent. Below the castle, and betwixt it and where the river ran, there were broad, flat meadows that stretched westward for half a league, and upon these stood the lists, around which were clustered many gay pavilions of knights, and much people moving to and fro continually, as though some great matter were toward.

"Here it was, I ween," said Sir Launcelot, "that King Arthur fought his first great battle against Colgrin and the Saxons ; and now, alas ! do bandits and ill-doers hold their Court here, which repenteth me sorely, for in good sooth it is a fair castle and of great strength."

CHAPTER XXI

How Sir Launcelot Won the Damsel Belle Sauvage in the Tourney

THUS, within a while, they came to the barrier of the lists, and there they spurred their beasts to the forefront of the throng, so that they could see within the lists as well as any that were there seated. And, as they there sat their horses, it so chanced that there stood beside them an old man, of some fourscore winters, who leaned upon a staff and had beside him a small bratchet, that gambolled with the children. So Sir Launcelot turned to the old man and said :

"Good fellow, I pray you tell me of this tourney, for what cause it be cried, and who they be that will contend for the prizes, for we be strangers here."

"My lords," said the man, "ye be indeed strangers, so the noise of this tourney hath not reached your ears, for, this fifteen days past, men have spoken of but little else."

"Well," said Sir Launcelot, "truly we be strangers from a far country ; therefore, of your courtesy, good fellow, I pray you tell us what signifieth this great throng of people."

"Sir," said the man, "as it seemeth to me it is because of the strangeness of the prize for which the knights that come hither will contend, for that prize is, by common report, the fairest damsel that ever any yet saw."

Now, when he heard these words, Sir Launcelot knit his brows full fiercely and his visage waxed very grim.

"Touching this damsel," said he, "doth report have it that she offereth herself of her own goodwill ? "

"Nay," said he, "that in good sooth doth she not, for, wit you well, my lord, that she hath this long time past been held prisoner by Sir Yorlande, the lord of the castle, and, because of the hot debate that hath long time been betwixt him and his knights as to this damsel, who shall possess her, he hath let cry this tourney, so that all men may do battle for her, and, whichsoever of all these shall prevail, with him will Sir Yorlande then himself do battle, and to the victor the damsel."

So spake the old man, and, at his words, Sir Launcelot's brow grew black as thunder.

"*Pardie!*" said he, "but this business hath a foul savour."

"Foul indeed," said Sir Gileas, "for meseemeth we have here as sorely distressed a damsel as ever man yet heard of."

And this he said of intent, for now, thought he in his heart, must Sir Launcelot needs do battle for the fulfilment of his vows. But, as for Sir Launcelot, he sat gazing before him as one who neither sees nor hears, for full loth was he to enter the lists, and yet—such was the old man's tale—there seemed to him no remedy but that he must, by some means or another, succour this damsel or else for evermore stand dishonoured and forsworn.

"Yet," thought he, "it may well be that this old fellow hath heard false reports, and that this damsel is but some common trull who, for her own greater glory, hath ordained this tourney and had it noised abroad that she is being forced thereto as a lamb to the sacrifice."

So to Sir Gileas he said:

"As for that, we shall know of a certainty right soon, for the appointed hour draweth nigh."

So, for a while, they sat still where they were, till they heard the castle clock smite the hour of noon, and then, even as the chimes still rang, the gate in the outer wall was thrown wide and there came forth a great wagon drawn by a single horse and hemmed in on all sides by men-at-arms. Then they saw that, on the wagon, was a high, gilt chair whereon sat a damsel clothed in a single robe of scarlet samite sewn with gold. On the wagon at her feet lay a golden coronal, and this, as it would seem, she had shaken from her head by violence, for her hair was loose and hung in great disarray about her shoulders. She sat, not upright or at ease, but straining strangely forward, after the manner of one about to run a race, at which they wondered greatly, till they saw that her hands were bound together behind the back of her chair, and her ankles bound to the legs thereof. As for her eyes, they were wide and round as those of a young babe, and she turned them continually from this side to that after the manner of a hunted beast; and her lips were wide-parted, as the lips of one who breathes hard and fast from some great labour. So, as she thus sat, it seemed to the two knights, who there beheld her, that she had scarce come to womanhood, so tender was her age.

Close behind the wagon, on which this damsel sat, rode a big knight on a great red horse, who, when he was come to the lists, lighted heavily down from his horse with a grunt like that of some great swine. This knight was in truth of a very dreadful countenance, for his face was thick with rough, red hair and his teeth juttet out from his mouth like those of some wild beast.

"Surely," said Sir Launcelot, "this must be one of the ogres of fable, for a fouler monster never yet saw I in the guise of man."

So, when this great beast that was man had lighted down from his horse, he went upon the high daïs and there sat him down upon a great gilt chair that was fellow to that whereon the damsel sat. Then four stout fellows got hold of the damsel's chair and placed it on the daïs beside the other. So she sat, with wild eyes, and lips drawn back from her teeth, like a wolf in the toils when the hunters draw near.

All this while those two knights sat still upon their horses and said nothing, for in truth Sir Launcelot's wrath was such within him that he could find no words wherewith to speak. As for Sir Gileas, he sat as one bemused, for, as it seemed to him, this damsel in the chair was the fairest thing that ever man's eye had rested on, and so he sat gaping at her spell-bound as one who knows not what he doth. Then, within a while, as they thus sat, each busy with his thoughts, came the pursuivant and the crier to the daïs, and, when they had sounded three blasts upon the horn, the crier said in a great voice :

"Oyez ! Oyez ! Oyez ! Inasmuch as the noble lord, Sir Yorlande, hath been put to much labour of body and mind by reason of divers disputes anent the damsel known as 'La Belle Sauvage,' now be it known to all men that this damsel is his by the right of capture, and that any, who would have her from him, must first make trial of his strength in the lists against all comers, and, when he hath so prevailed against all comers, then must he do battle with the noble lord, Sir Yorlande, and, should he overthrow him, then will the damsel be his beyond debate or quarrel ; but, should Sir Yorlande overthrow him, then shall that knight die. And furthermore be it known to all men that these jousts shall be with spears alone, nor shall any knight that hath a sword at his side be suffered to enter the lists."

Now the craft of this decree was very clear to all men, for

it was manifest that no man could prevail against all and every knight of the throng that was there assembled upon the meadows of Bedegraine, and yet have breath and strength left to do battle with so big a knight as Sir Yorlande, who was fresh and unbreathed. Howbeit, so besotted were all those knights with the beauty of the damsel whom they named "Belle Sauvage," that they recked little of this or of that, so only they might do battle for her. And, indeed, so it was that scarcely had the crier made an end before a knight bearing a red shield on which was a white cross spurred hotly into the midst of the lists and, when he had abashed his point before the damsel that sat on the high daïs, he turned him about and there sat with spear in rest. Thereupon a knight with a white shield rode soberly in and, when the gates were closed and the herald had cried "*Laissez-aller!*" these two hurtled together full fiercely, and the knight with the white cross unseated the other. Then, as fast as each might follow other, came six others, one by one, and the white-cross knight unhorsed them all, but, in the end, he was himself overborne by a knight in black armour. So this black knight, then, overthrew three others, and then he was himself unhorsed. Then it was, about this time, that Sir Gileas, with no word to any, suddenly set spurs to his horse and thrust into the lists like one possessed, and there did he, to Sir Launcelot's great content, overbear a knight in white armour and another. But now there rode into the lists a big knight all in green, and this one put Sir Gileas from his horse so starkly that, for a while, he lay where he fell.

"*Pardie!*" said Sir Launcelot within himself, "he shall pay for that stroke, anon," for he held Sir Gileas in great liking. So, in the meanwhile, the green knight overthrew seven more that came against him and so easily withal that many said:

"Here is one who will hold the lists against any who may come." But, when seven had gone down before him, then, wit you well that Sir Launcelot could withhold him no longer, for he thought:

"Here is a knight who is worthy of the utmost that a man may put forth," and so straightway he rode into the lists and dressed his spear against the green knight. Then those two came together like two wild boars and the green knight was struck clean from his saddle, whereat all those within and without the lists made great dole, for they held him to be a passing good knight and worthy of the prize.

"Howbeit," they said, "no man may endure for ever, and the green knight hath overborne as many as a man may." Herein, however, they very greatly erred, for the knight with the five white stars upon his shield overthrew no less than nineteen knights that came against him, the one following the other, while all those that looked down upon the lists marvelled more and more who this might be that wrought such wonderlie deeds. Five times, while he so held the lists, did Sir Launcelot change his horse, for he rode, now the squire's horse, and now that of Sir Gileas, and then once more his own, which had been the horse of Sir Tauleas. And six spears he broke in the tilting, but ever, as he brake them, knights whom he had overthrown came forward and pressed their spears upon him, so that he had no lack. In these jousts, there came against him both the knight with the white cross on the red shield, and the knight in black armour, for these were both good knights and valiant, but Sir Launcelot put them both from their horses, and so, in the end, there was none left to withsay him, and he sat in the lists alone and silent, while all men marvelled who he might be.

Thereupon Sir Yorlande got him heavily upon his great horse, and that with all the speed he might, for he had little mind that the knight with the five stars upon his shield should recover his breath and strength; and, as he so did, Sir Launcelot once more got his own horse, which had been Sir Tauleas's, for he had proved him to be a passing good courser. Thus, as he turned him to the lists, the green knight that he had overthrown pressed to his side and said: "Sir Knight, take you my spear, for I dare truly say that a better never came to my hand." So thus they exchanged their spears, and then those two knights, Sir Launcelot and Sir Yorlande, made them ready, one at either end of the lists, and when the herald blew upon his horn, they fewtered their spears and hurtled together. Then, for the first time since he came into those lists, Sir Launcelot put forth all his strength, for he was wood-wrath against Sir Yorlande because of the shameful manner of his dealing with the damsel, Belle Sauvage. So, when they met, Sir Yorlande's spear broke upon Sir Launcelot's shield, but, so stout was the spear which the green knight had given him, that it broke not but held bravely, and, with the shock, both Sir Yorlande and his horse were overturned, so that the horse lay on its back with all its four legs in the air and with the knight beneath its weight. Then, within a while, the horse with

great labour got to its feet, but Sir Yorlande lay there as one who is dead, until such time as men came with a litter and bore him to the castle.

When that was done, the judges made no tarrying but bade the crier let all men know that the victor in that tourney was the knight with the five white stars upon a black shield, and, thereafter, he that was leader among them prayed him that he would make known his name.

"Sir," said he, "I go by the name of Sir Oswald de Sur-luse," but, for all their asking, his umberere he would not do off, for fear lest some might know him.

"Then Sir Oswald," said the judge, "inasmuch as you have overcome all others, the prize is now yours according to the conditions of the jousts, to be delivered to you as you may require."

"Gramercy of your courtesy," said he, "and therefore, sir, I would pray you that the damsel be unbound and led hither."

"My lord," said the judge, "meseemeth that in this you err somewhat, for, as men say, no wolf is fiercer than this damsel when her hands be loosed."

"Howbeit," said Sir Launcelot, "I would pray you that she be so dealt with."

So, thereupon, they loosed the damsel's hands and feet, and led her down into the lists, one man on either side holding her by the arm, as though she were a sheep for the slaughter. Then, when she was there come, Sir Launcelot lighted down from his horse and very courteously he saluted the damsel, and then he lifted her upon his horse and led her from the lists, whereat all that were there wondered very greatly, for such was not the custom of the times. Then there was a great cry among them all that he should do off his helm and show what manner of man he was, but this he would not, and so passed upon his way. But those knights that he had overthrown were not thus readily to be rebuked, for very greatly did they desire to see the face of one who had shown himself to be by so much their master; and so they pressed closely behind Sir Launcelot and the damsel, and behind Sir Gileas and his squire. Now when he saw this, how that all the throng pressed upon those four that would be gone privily, the green knight spurred his horse forward, and then turned him about with lowered spear against those that followed.

"Fair sirs," he said, "I would have you to know that there be none here that hath need of your fellowship; therefore

wit ye well that any who would push this matter further must first have ado with me." Whereat they were greatly abashed, for full well they wist that, but for the victor, there was none there that could withstand the green knight. So they turned them about and went their ways. But from that day on, so long as any of those knights lived, it was the common report in the Forest of Sherwood that Sir Oswald de Surluse was the strongest knight that ever bore spear. And when men said : " That is but foolishness, for how can that be said of any other than Sir Launcelot ? " then would they answer : " Sir Oswald was, by great misadventure, slain by bandits as he sat unarmed beside a well, else had he surely proved himself a bigger knight than Sir Launcelot." For they understood not that he had been so slain before the tourney at Bedegraine and not after.

So, when all those knights had turned back from following the knight who had gained the prize, the green knight spurred after the three who rode with the damsel and, when he was come to Sir Launcelot's knee, he said in his ear :

" God speed thee, Launcelot ; but a murrain on the quest that brought thee hither, for, but for thee, I make but little doubt that the prize had been mine."

" Sir," said he, " I require you, as you are a gentleman, that you speak not my name. And now, I pray you, tell me who are you who have thus discovered me."

" I am Gawaine," said the other.

" Gawaine ! " said he, " and how wist you who I was."

" As for that," Sir Gawaine said, " that were no hard matter for any who hath seen you aforetime in the lists. So you would keep your name unknown, Sir Launcelot, you must needs avoid the lists."

" That would I gladly do," said Sir Launcelot ; " but so it was that this damsel needed succour and that might I not readily deny her. But, for the love of Jesu, betray me not to any."

" Dismay you not," Sir Gawaine said, " for sooner would I have my tongue torn out by the roots than so betray you."

" And prithee, my lord, Sir Gawaine, what do you in these marches ? " Sir Launcelot asked of him ; whereat the other laughed.

" In good sooth," said he, " it is not to be denied but that I came hither because of the noise of this damsel's beauty, but, inasmuch as mine uncle, King Arthur, loves not that his

knights should meddle in such matters, I hid my name and bore a borrowed shield. Howbeit, as it would seem, I have but lost my pain. But greatly it marvelleth me, Sir Launcelot, that a fair damsel should ride thus at thy bridle-hand, for this sorts but ill with the name thou bearest at the Court."

"As for that," said he, "wit you well, Sir Gawaine, that I am in no wise well ensured how I may best bestow her; therefore, so soon as we be quit of prying eyes and ears, I must take thought how I had best deal, so that no further harm befall her."

"Well, fare thee well, my good lord," said Sir Gawaine, "and trust thou well that, for all the diligent search that I may make in the country of Listinois, I shall yet bear to mine uncle no tidings of that lost knight of the Round Table that wanders naked through the wilderness."

With that he turned and rode lightly away, and, when he was so departed, those other four went on their ways, riding westward through the Forest of Sherwood.

CHAPTER XXII

How it Fared with Sir Launcelot and the Damsel Belle Sauvage
in the Forest of Sherwood

NOW, so soon as Sir Gawaine had departed and they were alone, Sir Launcelot and Sir Gileas did off their helms for greater coolness, for the evening was warm, and so, with their helms upon their saddle-bows, they rode onward. At this, the damsel that was named Belle Sauvage turned upon them swift sidelong glances, wherewith to appraise them, after the manner of women; but, of that which was in her heart, she gave no sign nor spoke so much as one word.

So they rode for a space, and then, within a while, Sir Gileas pressed his horse close to her side and, by all the means he might, sought continually to please her, whereunto she paid no greater heed than did the oak trees in the midst of which they rode, but, after those first quick glances, sat her horse with a face of stone and with sullen eyes that looked neither to the right hand nor to the left.

Thus, within a while, came they to a sheltered hollow in the forest, through which flowed a clear stream of water, rippling with soft music over the flat, brown stones that paved it; and there they all lighted down from their horses, and the two knights disarmed them, while the squire laid before them the food and wine which they had brought with them from the Abbey of Belle Aventure. Thereat, for the first time, the damsel spoke.

"Sirs," said she, "now had you best bind me hand and foot, in like manner as did those other knights, for else, when it be dark, will I most surely flee into the forest with all the speed I may."

"Fair damsel," said Sir Launcelot, "an you would flee into the forest, wit you well that there be none here that will hinder you. Howbeit, an I so may, I would give you contrary counsel, for, as I am a true knight, you shall have no villainy of any that be here, whereas in the forest there be wild beasts and robbers, and divers other dangers that may beset you."

"Wolves in the forest there may truly be," she said, "but of these have I less dread than of wolves in armour, for these, wit you well, are beyond measure the beastlier of the twain."

"Fair lady," said Sir Launcelot, "these be hard words and spoken I dare say without full understanding, for verily we be no wolves in armour, but true knights of whom thou shalt have no discourtesy, so only you will rest here till the morn, and then, under the fair light of heaven, may we see more clearly how we may most profitably deal."

"Fair words and foul deeds go ever hand in hand," she said, "and the fairer the words, the fouler are the deeds that bear them company. But what profiteth it to waste words? Am I not thy prize to do with as thou wilt? Make an end and let me die."

"Fair maiden, whom they call Belle Sauvage," said he, "I would have you to know that I won you but for the sake of true knighthood and chivalry, and for to put to the rebuke those false knights that so basely held you in bonds. And now wit you well that you are free to go whither you will, and, on the morn, this good knight and I will bring you safely to any castle wherein you would seek harbourage; but, for this night, I pray you for your better safety that you abide here with us, and that you shall have no villainy of any I swear to you by the faith I owe to God, and by the holy Order of Knighthood."

"And likewise I," said Sir Gileas.

So, when they had thus said, she held silence for a while, and then, on a sudden, she fell upon her face and burst into a great weeping, so that those knights were mightily confounded and wist not what they had best do; and there she lay for a great while, writhing and sweltering as one out of her mind. Then, when they asked her why she thus wept, she said:

"I know not why I weep, but methinks your great courtesy hath broken me down, and therefore I weep."

So then they comforted her as best they might, and anon, she dried her eyes and sat up again as she had aforetime. Then, when she was so far recovered, she smiled upon them and said:

"Fair sirs and gentle knights, I pray you pardon me my weeping, for, wit you well that, since such time as I have been captive in the Castle of Bedegraine, have I had no gentle usage from any, but only rude and barbarous dealings, as

though I had been no better than a beast of the field ; and well did they name me Belle Sauvage, for the faces of some I tore with my nails, and then, when they bound my hands behind my back, I spat in the face of one and bit another to the bone, and right willingly would I have killed them all and myself to boot, had the means been to my hand. And, wit you well, that, of all that foul throng, there was none more foul than Sir Yorlande himself, though but little behind him in beastliness came two that were named Tauleas and Fallodin."

At that Sir Gileas gave a great cry.

"What!" she said, "know you aught of those two foul bandits?"

"In very truth we know of them," said Sir Gileas, "for they were both slain in fair fight by this most noble knight that sitteth here beside us."

"Did Sir Oswald indeed slay them?" she asked; and, when Sir Gileas answered her "Yea," she gazed upon Sir Launcelot in silence for a while and then said:

"Those two were accounted passing good knights of their hands."

"They were a shame to knighthood and to chivalry," said Sir Launcelot; "of them let us speak no more; for more profitably may we speak of thee, madam, and of how thou camest to be thus basely held in bonds."

"It was in this wise," she said: "Upon a day, some few weeks past, Earl Leofryn, my father, and I were on hawking in the woods of Listinois, and so it was that our falcon had led us many a league astray and we, little heeding whither we went, followed, and then, all on a sudden, these bandits beset us from all sides at once, and there did they most foully slay my father, and me did they bind with cords and bare me away slung before one of them on his saddle-bow as though I had been a slain deer. Then, when we were come to the Castle of Bedegraine, by the mercy of God, there was hot debate among them all, whose spoil I should be; and so they railed at one another and fought continually like wild beasts, to my great profit, for so it fortuneed thereby that I escaped them all. Then, within a while, with one accord, they resolved upon this tourney, for there was none other remedy that they could shape wherewith to end their strife. And, in this, Sir Yorlande was in accord with all those others, for full well wist he that there was no knight within these marches who might

withstand him and his great red horse, in especial where they had first done battle with many others. Therefore, to this end, was it cried abroad that none should bear a sword, for, though with his spear and horse he beareth down most, yet with the sword is he readily overmatched."

So thus she made an end of speaking, and then, when she thought upon her father, Earl Leoffryn, and on the manner of his death, she fell to weeping anew, whereat those two knights made great sorrow.

"Alas!" said Sir Launcelot, "that you should so weep, for, wit you well, fair damsel, that all our will is to gladden you."

"Sir," she said, "I thank you both, and, *certes*, of my weeping I make some shame, for, wit you well, sirs, that for this month past, while I sheltered with those brute beasts, no tear hath passed my eyes; but now, meseemeth, I can hardly hold from weeping, so faint am I become and feeble."

So then they asked of her her name, and she said that she was named the lady Lindreth; howbeit, as she said, none within the castle had called her by that name, but ever they spoke of her as *La Belle Sauvage*.

"And savage I truly was," she said, "but now, as it would seem, my savagery hath all departed and left me; for nothing do I but sit here and weep like a fool."

"You are attaint, lady Lindreth, from long fasting and the great labour of the day," said Sir Launcelot, "so now let us make you all the good cheer we may, and, thereafter, you will weep no more, for you shall have no cause for weeping."

"Methinks in honest truth that I shall weep no more," she said, and, with that, her weeping ceased and she smiled upon them. So, when they had well eaten and drunk, their hearts were greatly cheered, and the lady Lindreth talked lightly and gaily, after the manner of a child, for such in good sooth she seemed in their eyes; but ever Sir Gileas gazed upon her as one besotted, for in truth he had such love unto her that he was stricken dumb so that he could not so much as find one word with which to speak to her.

After a little, as they thus sat in the moonlight, the lady Lindreth said: "Will you that I sing to you, my lords?" And when they both assented right gladly, she sat down upon her heels, as doth a child, and sung to them the sad, sweet songs of Wales, and ever, as she sang, her fingers plucked the twisted blades of grass from the ground beside her. So

sweetly did she sing that therewith Sir Gileas was moved to tears, for never, as it seemed to him, had so sweet a singing been heard on earth. Then she made an end and her hands dropped to her sides and, turning to Sir Launcelot, she said : " Is my lord pleased ? "

" Truly would I be a deaf adder were I not pleased," he said, " for so sweet a singing have I never yet heard—no, not even from Sir Tristram."

" Ah ! Sir Tristram ! " she said, " that is the great Cornish knight who overthrew all men until the coming of Sir Launcelot. Would that I might some day look upon either of those twain ! "

" Come," said he, " it is time for sleep " ; and, with that, he bade the squire bring the blankets. Now, of these, the monks had given them but three, for such, at the time of their parting, was all their need, but, when they found that there was one lacking, Sir Launcelot put that which was his away from him, for so, he said, he ever slept the better ; but for the other three there was, for each, a blanket.

Very soundly slept all those four through the night, for they were sore-travailed and attaint with the labours of the day, nor did any stir till the morning sun was slanting steeply through the trees. Then the lady Lindreth awoke and, for a while, gazed around her without understanding, as one bemused with sleep ; but presently there came to her mind all that had befallen at the tourney, whereat she smiled to herself well pleased.

A little apart from those other two Sir Launcelot slept heavily, but, ever and again, he shivered in his sleep, and she, seeing this, took the blanket that had been hers and laid it over him. Then she knelt down beside him and kissed him lightly on the lips, and, having so done, leapt lightly away to where the stream broadened into a clear, deep pool. Here for a while she stood in thought, and then, slipping from her robe of red samite, she dropped silently into the water. Within a while she came forth again, and then, for warmth and dryness, she leapt about the woods like a young fawn till her body was all aglow ; then, with her red robe once more about her, she went back to where the two knights still lay sleeping, and there, sitting upon her heels as was her wont, she wove a wreath of primroses and bound it round her hair. Thus she waited.

Of the three who slept, the first to awaken was the squire,

who, seeing the lady Lindreth there seated, awake and well-beseen, leapt to his feet as though ashamed of having slept so long, and busied himself with the horses. Then, within a while, it so was that the two knights awoke, but slowly and with much sorrow, as men who have been greatly wearied ; and, when they had their wits again, they gazed about them in some part bemused, and then their eyes fell upon the damsel as she sat before them with the primrose wreath upon her hair, and truly she was sweet as a wild-rose and very fair to look upon.

" God save you, sirs," said she, " for here is as fair a day as ever He yet made and already is the sun high above the trees."

" And we lie sleeping like men heavy with drink," said Sir Launcelot ; whereupon those two knights gat them to their feet and passed down through the trees to where the pool lay in the stream, and there they washed them. When they had thus done, the two knights walked apart and talked, each with other, long and earnestly. Then they all sat them down on molehills under the trees and there broke their fast, but wit you well that heaviness was upon those two knights, so that they spoke but little ; only the lady Lindreth was merry beyond measure, talking and laughing without cease, and busying herself continually with the needs of the others. So the sun rose in the heavens, and, within a while, Sir Launcelot said, speaking as one who hath but little love for that where-with he hath been charged :

" Lady Lindreth, have you any kin living with whom we may bestow you ? "

Now, as he spoke these words, all the laughter passed away from that damsel's face, and full soberly she looked upon Sir Launcelot.

" Sir," said she, " I have no kin ; for my mother is dead now these ten years and I was ever her only child. And now men tell me that, my father being no more, enemies have seized our castle, so that I am indeed an outcast upon the earth."

" Then," said Sir Launcelot, " must we take short counsel where we may best bestow you in safety."

" Bestow me ! " she cried, " and wherefore prithee the need to bestow me in safety ? "

" How else could we deal ? " said he.

" How else indeed ? " quoth she. " So you would put me from you."

"That is unkindly said, fair lady Lindreth," said Sir Launcelot ; "for God knows I have no great heart to put you from me, but, wit you well, lady Lindreth, that I am journeying northward to a gentle lady who there keeps watch for me, and to have you in my company would bring but sorrow to us both."

"And the contrary would bring but sorrow to the one," she said. "Meseemeth, Sir Oswald, that in this you show me short courtesy."

"Jesu forfend that I should be discourteous," he said.

"What greater discourtesy forsooth could any show?" said she. "Did you not forjoust all others at the tourney and so win me for yourself? And now, having put to the rebuke all those who held me to be worthy of bruises and buffets, you will have none of me! and this doth me great pain."

"Truly," said he, "I did but joust to save you from villainy and bondage, for thereto are we of the Round Table sworn; but no true knight should I be did I but change one bondage for another."

"But so the bondage be welcome," said she; "were it not more unknighly than the contrary to loose me from it?"

"As for that," said he, "as Christ is my Saviour, I know not."

Whereupon she rose to her feet and stood before them as one graven out of stone.

"Fair lords," said she, "may I, of your courtesy, have from you the horse whereon I rode hither? For I would get me gone."

Then, when they enquired whither she would ride: "I will to Bedegraine," she said, "for there found I favour in the eyes of many, whereas here as it would seem I have of you two knights but scant love."

At this so sorely was Sir Gileas moved that no longer could he hold silence, but, standing before her, said:

"Lady Lindreth, very sure am I that there is no man that beareth life that holdeth you in greater esteem than do I, for, by the faith of my body, I love you more than any lady that ever my eyes have seen."

Then, when she still held silence, standing before them and saying no word, neither letting her eyes rest on either the one or the other, Sir Launcelot said:

"Lady Lindreth, wit you well that this noble knight, Sir

Gileas, hath cast great love unto you, so that scarce can he speak for the hotness of his heart. And trust thou well that he is a full noble knight and of good lineage, and one that will deal with you courteously and gently. And this knight, Sir Gileas, hath a fair castle in the country of Surluse, and thither will he now lead you full courteously, so only you will go with him. And this, lady Lindreth, I pray you to do for the better comfort of us all. Therefore my counsel would be that you two ride forthwith to the Abbey of Belle Aventure and there be wedded by the good abbot, and the horses and the armour which I there left, of these will I make to you a free gift, so that therewith you may buy that of which you have need, and so am I very sure that of yourself you will find happiness and of this fair knight gentleness and courtesy."

"Of that can I ensure you," said Sir Gileas; whereat she stamped her foot and turned upon him a face of mockery and scorn, bidding him hold his peace for a meddlesome fool. Then to Sir Launcelot she turned, with little less of mockery than to the other, and said:

"Sir Oswald, gramercy of your goodness, but wit you well that, of all this, will I have none, no, not upon any entreaties nor for no fair language."

Wherewith she stamped her foot upon the ground once more and fell to weeping gently. So then those two knights looked each upon other, as men who are at their wits' end; and, while they so looked, she sang softly to herself some sad song in the Welsh tongue, of which they that stood by knew not the meaning, and, as she sang, her tears fell the faster so that, in the end she could sing no more. Then, on a sudden, her mood changed and she cast herself upon the ground at Sir Launcelot's feet and clasped him round the knees.

"Oh! good Sir Oswald," she said, "do me not this great discourtesy, to put me thus from you, for so shall I surely die; but, so you will but suffer me to be in your company, I will be to you both squire and varlet; for I will tend your horse and burnish your armour, and kindle fires when it is cold, and watch beside you when you sleep, for to scare away wild beasts; and never will I speak no word nor shall you so much as wot that I am there, unless you beckon, only so you put me not from you."

Thus, as she made an end, she lifted her face and smiled up at Sir Launcelot through her tears, and, so fair was she to look upon, that, when he had once looked, he stooped down

and pulled her arms apart full ungently, so that she fell to her face upon the ground; wherewith he ran with all the speed he might to where his horse stood, saddled by a sycamore tree and, when he was there come, he leaped upon its back and galloped away headlong through the forest.

"There," said the lady Lindreth, "goeth the goodliest knight and the most discourteous of all the world." And "There," said Sir Gileas, "goeth the noblest knight that ever drew breath."

CHAPTER XXIII

How the Pentecost Tourney was Held at Lonazep on Humber

FOR two days, after that he had parted from those others, Sir Launcelot rode northward, until he had reached the city of York, and there he bartered his horse for food, and, when he had rested him for a while, he set forth with a well-stored wallet upon his back and a strong staff in his hand. Thus he walked for two days, and then misfortune came upon him, for, as he slept, there came by one who stole his wallet. Thus it seemed that there was no remedy but that he should now go foodless, and so he set forth fully resolved thereto, and thus it was that for three days and nights no food passed his lips, and then, on the fourth day, he came to the Castle of Corbin, and there, for very weariness, he fell prone upon the ground and lay as one dead.

Now there was a little maiden, of the country of Sarraz, that waited upon Dame Brisen, and it so fortunèd that she had gone upon an errand to the mainland, and, as she made back, she espied, at the nether end of the bridge, a man in shirt and breeches that lay by the roadside as though dead. So she looked upon him with round eyes, and thus went on her ways homeward. Then, when she was come to the castle and Dame Brisen questioned her, how she had sped, she answered her :

" Full well sped I of my errand, Dame Brisen, and, as I drew near to the bridge, behold ! there lay hard by the gateway the goodliest man that ever I yet looked upon, but so wasted and wan that I deemed he had been dead."

" Mercy on us ! " cried Dame Brisen, " it marvelleth me greatly who it can be that thus lieth there."

Wherewith she ran to the lady Elaine and told her what the maid had said. " Go," said she, " and quickly bid Eric and Haviland bring my father's litter " ; but she herself ran with all the speed she might across the bridge, for full well wist she who it was that lay upon the ground by the gateway. So, when she came there, she fell straightway upon her knees beside him. " Oh, my dear lord," she said, " how came you

in such evil case ? ” For he lay, in truth, as one that is dead, so that she wept for sorrow so to see him. Then, when the litter was come, they bore him to the castle and there they prepared him a bath, and laid him in a richly-covered bed, and tended him with all the love and care they might. So, for a week, he lay, while the Earl’s physician tended him daily, and then, upon a day, he was so far recovered that he went out and sat upon the castle wall, for the day was fair. Thus, while he sat in the sunshine, the physician said to him :

“ Sir, it is by great good fortune that you are thus far mended, for even now must I get me across to the Fern Island, where the good knight, Sir Bliant, lieth, as they say, sick to death. Therefore, Sir Launcelot, I pray you hold me excused of your further charge, for on the Fern Island must I bide till that knight be either recovered or dead.”

“ Go thy way,” said Sir Launcelot, “ for, in good sooth, I have no further need of a physician.”

So he departed to the Fern Island, and there within three days Sir Bliant died. When Earl Pelles learned of this, wit you well that he was a grieved man for, as he said, “ There is now a fair island and, on it, a full noble castle, and now must it fall to disrepair because that there is none therein to maintain it.”

Whereupon Sir Launcelot said :

“ Sir Earl, I would ask of you a gift, and it is this : that you bestow this island upon the lady Elaine and me, for there may I, by the grace of God, reasonably escape the hue and cry with which I wot full well the Round Table fellowship will seek me. For to Corbin will they very surely come, and then will I have no remedy but that I must go with them, and that would I most willingly eschew.”

Then was Earl Pelles very sorrowful, when he heard these words, and, for a while, he held silence, but then, in the end he said :

“ Full loth am I, Sir Launcelot, that you and my daughter should thus depart from me and from the Castle of Corbin, for wit you well that I am waxing old, and great joy have I of your fellowship and of that of your son, Galahad. And, so you all go from me, then is my joy gone for ever. Howbeit, in this matter, will I not willingly withsay you, for full well wot I that they will surely seek you here ; but, upon the island, you need have no fears, for there a league of green sea will ever hedge you in.”

So he made them a gift of the Isle of Bliant, which men called the Fern Island, and there Sir Launcelot and the lady Elaine abode three years, while diligent search was made for Sir Launcelot long and broad throughout the realm. And so great was the joy of those two—Sir Launcelot and the lady Elaine—that they had thus come together, after so great griefs and perils, that they named the place "The Joyous Isle," even as, seven years before, they had given the name of Joyous Garde to Castle Case. There then they dwelt, with Galahad their son, in great joy and contentment.

Now, when these three had been in the Joyous Isle a little while, Sir Bors, who was cousin to Sir Launcelot, came riding to the Castle of Corbin, and there made he diligent enquiry for the knight; but to all the questions that he put Earl Pelles did but shake his head and said that, as he might well see, Sir Launcelot was not there. So then Sir Bors looked about him, and asked how it fared with the lady Elaine and her son, Galahad.

"Right well," said the Earl, "but, at this time, they have gone from me for a season to the islands, for thus it ever is with them in the season of summer."

Whereat Sir Bors held silence, but his thoughts were busy within him, and, on the morrow, he rode to Joyous Garde and there sought Sir Tristram.

"What of my cousin, Sir Launcelot?" he said, "for the Queen and King Arthur are like to go out of their minds for the loss of him."

"Sir Launcelot!" said he, "Sir Launcelot! little wot I of Sir Launcelot; but, meseemeth, it is at Corbin that you should seek him and not here, for there will he be found if he be on live."

But Sir Tristram was ever but a bad dissembler, and full well Sir Bors knew in his heart where he might light upon his cousin, if he had the will thereto; and very greatly did he rejoice within himself, at the guileful answers that Earl Pelles and Sir Tristram gave him, for now he knew of a surety that Sir Launcelot was not dead, as many supposed, but that, for some purpose of his own, he was hiding from the eyes of men. But of all this, when he returned to Camelot, he said nothing to King Arthur, for because of the great love that he bore unto Sir Launcelot.

So, for three full years Sir Launcelot and the lady Elaine lived in the Joyous Isle, which men in other days had called

the Island of Bliant, and some the Fern Island, and never once, through all those many days, did he draw a sword or lay a lance in rest. Thus, in the second year, it came about that the Pentecost tourney was cried for Lonazep, which is on Humber, and, when the noise of this came to the country of Sarras, Sir Tristram would have had Sir Launcelot go with him to the jousts. "For so may you disguise you," said he, "that none will know you." But Sir Launcelot would not, for he had, as he said, no great heart for jousts and tourneys, nor for the winning of prizes and worship; and well content withal was he to abide where he was. So, when he could not prevail on him to go, Sir Tristram said:

"Well, then, I must even go alone."

"Well, God speed you," said Sir Launcelot, "for I make little doubt but that you will bear away the prize."

So, when the day came, Sir Tristram rode forth from Joyous Garde on his great roan horse, *Passe-Brewel*, and with his squire Hebes behind him, and, on the fourth day, he came to Lonazep on Humber, and found lodging in the town. Then, within two days, were held the jousts; and, on the first day, Sir Palomides won the prize, for Sir Tristram stood aside, because of the promise which he had made to Sir Launcelot, when he had made him the gift of Joyous Garde.

Then, on the second day, Sir Palomides stood aside, for such was the custom of the lists, and Sir Tristram rode in and overthrew all the knights that he encountered and bore away the prize. Then came the third day of the jousting and, on that day, Sir Bleboris, that was cousin to Sir Launcelot, overthrew all whom he encountered and won the prize, which was a rich cloak of cloth of gold, and this cloak he then took upon his spear-point and, before all those lords and gentlewomen, laid it at the feet of the lady Ermaril, who was wife to Sir Segwarides, the Greek.

Now, at this, Sir Segwarides rose in his place and, with all the voice he had, named Sir Bleboris a knave and recreant knight. So these two must now needs fight with iron-tipped spears, according to the custom of those days; and so it was that, in the battle, Sir Bleboris dealt Sir Segwarides a sore wound beneath the arm, so that he fell from his horse in a swoon, whereupon they bore him to a hostry that was near by, and thither went the lady Ermaril to tend him. But, on the day next following, she came not, and, when Sir Segwarides made enquiry for her, it was told him that she had ridden off

westward with Sir Bleboris. Thereupon he was a right doleful man and he sent for Sir Tristram and said :

" Most noble knight, you see in what evil case I here lie, for I am in truth sore wounded ; and now men say that Sir Bleboris hath borne off the lady Ermaril, my wife, most treasonably and unknightly. Now, therefore, I pray you, Sir Tristram, of your goodness and courtesy, that you make haste to ride after that recreant knight and rescue from him this lady of mine, for meseemeth that there is none other, among all the fellowship of knights here assembled, that be big enough for Sir Bleboris, but only you, Sir Tristram ; for, wit you well and doubt it not, he is a passing good knight of his hands and hath smitten me full sore. This then I pray of you of your knighthood to do, and, so you will restore me that lady, then will I for ever be beholden to you beyond measure, for to me she is very dear."

When he had so spoken, Sir Tristram bade him be of good cheer, for that he would get him to horse forthwith and ride after Sir Bleboris till he had found him, and, when he had so done, do battle with him to the utterance, and, if he had the mastery, then would he bring back that lady to Lonazep so quickly as he might. Then Sir Segwarides gave Sir Tristram great thanks and he went forth and got him his horse.

So for a day and a night Sir Tristram rode after Sir Bleboris and the lady Ermaril, and, on the second day, about sundown, he overtook them, and, thereupon, he loudly called upon Sir Bleboris to yield up the lady or else to keep him from him as best he might. At this Sir Bleboris turned and fewtered his spear, and then those two knights ran together as fast as they might go ; and there Sir Tristram smote the other so hard a buffet that he fell from his horse in a swoon and there lay, whereupon Sir Tristram took the bridle of the lady Ermaril's horse, and turned him back the way he had come.

Now it so was that Sir Tristram had overtaken Sir Bleboris within a day and a night of the time he set forth, but it was not till ten days later that he rode back to Lonazep, with the lady Ermaril at his bridle hand, whereat the King looked very sourly, for all the easy tale Sir Tristram told of how that he had lost him in the wilderness and only come up with Sir Bleboris after great peril and adventure. But Sir Segwarides being sick of a fever from his wound, knew nothing of all this, and right glad was he in his heart to find the lady Ermaril at his side and tending his hurts once more.

Now turn we to Sir Palomides, who was brother to Sir Segwarides. When this knight heard of the long tarrying that those two—the lady Ermaril and Sir Tristram—had made on their homeward journey, wit you well that he was as a wild boar that rageth in the forest ; and so he came to Sir Tristram and said :

“ Sir, now must you do battle with me to the death, for I hold you to be a recreant knight, and a false, in that you have dealt full traitorously with the lady Ermaril, my brother’s wife.”

“ As for that, Sir Palomides,” said he, “ have no fear that I shall fail you, for there is this many a day that between us that had best be abated with spear and sword ; and so shall we greatly ease our hearts.”

But, when the bruit of this came to King Arthur’s ear, he sent for those two knights and said :

“ Fair sirs, this may not be ; for, as at present, Sir Segwarides hath no better knowledge than that the lady Ermaril and Sir Tristram rode homeward as fast as they might, but, were you two to be at debate, it is as sure as death that the noise of it would come to his ears, and then would he have full certainty of some misdealing ; and that were great pity. Now, therefore, I charge you both, of your knighthood, that this matter be here ended. And, as for you, Sir Tristram, I require you that you ride back forthwith to your Castle of Joyous Garde and make no tarrying ; for it is not to be denied but that, in this matter of the lady Ermaril, you have dealt in some part unknighly, inasmuch as Sir Segwarides had entrusted her to your keeping.”

So, at that, Sir Tristram abashed his head and, for a while, he might not speak, but, in the end, he said :

“ My liege lord, wit you well that, in this, I am not wholly to blame ; for I dare truly undertake that there is no living man so hardy that he might withsay the lady Ermaril in any matter whereunto she is fully resolved.”

“ Now, by my faith ! ” said King Arthur, “ that is not well said. For it is ever the part of a true knight to shield fair ladies from ill winds that blow about their name ; and to do the contrary bringeth shame upon knighthood. Therefore, Sir Tristram, trust thou well and forget it not that, for thy manner of dealing in this matter, thou shalt have scant love of me.”

Whereupon Sir Tristram went out from before him very

greatly ashamed, and so took his horse and rode to Joyous Garde.

Then, so soon as he was gone, King Arthur sent for Sir Ulfius, who was the oldest of his knights, and, as some said, the wisest ; and, when he was come to him, he said :

" This lady Ermaril, as it seemeth to me, is the causer of much heat and envy among such of our Round Table fellowship as are thereto inclined, and this doth me great pain. Now therefore, advise me, as well as you may, how I had best deal."

" Sir," said Sir Ulfius, " it is very manifest that this lady Ermaril, because of her great beauty, worketh much mischief in men's hearts, even as the winter frost worketh mischief upon the apple-blossom, and old age upon the joints of men : for wit ye well, my lord, King Arthur, that it was she who first beguiled King Mark away from the lady Isolde, and she it was too whose beauty came near to destroying his brother Sir Boudwin. Therefore, because of her great beauty, and the wiles wherewith she beguileth men, it were well done for the peace of this fellowship, as it seemeth to me, that the lady were bestowed in some safe place so that she mischief our knights no more."

" That is well said," said King Arthur, " but where may I find me such a place ? for full loth would I be to banish from the Round Table fellowship so good a knight as Sir Segwarides."

" Sir," said he, " so you will be advised of me, there is no present need to push the matter thus far, for it is now a full year and more since, as you well wot, Sir Tristram slew in fair fight King Nabon, of the Island of Servage, by the Welsh coast ; and ever, from that time on, that fair island hath been void of any lord, whereby the people be come to some turbulence and misrule. Now therefore, my lord, King Arthur, my counsel would be that ye make this knight, Sir Segwarides, lord of the island of Servage, which is a goodly land and large, and rich in flocks and herds, and so shall he pay truage to you and serve you well. And, as for the lady Ermaril and the mischief that she worketh in the hearts of men, wit you well, my lord, that between her and your knights of the Round Table there will ever be a long and broad arm of salt sea water."

So King Arthur did as Sir Ulfius counselled him, and appointed Sir Segwarides lord of the island of Servage, and

there he did the King good service, and in the end, was killed outside the walls of Carlisle. What time Sir Launcelot rescued the Queen ; but, as to how the lady Ermaryl fared upon the island, wit you well that the book saith nothing.

CHAPTER XXIV

How, because of King Ban's Death, Sir Launcelot Sailed
for Guienne

TWO full years had come and gone since that the tourney was held at Lonazep on Humber and then it was noised abroad that King Ban had died in his country of Guienne, and, when word of this was brought to Camelot, Sir Bors was greatly troubled in mind, for now, as it seemed to him, there was no remedy but that Sir Launcelot should have quick tidings of this matter. So he spoke privily with Sir Hector, who was brother unto Sir Launcelot, and told him how that he knew of a surety that Sir Launcelot was on the islands upon the coast of Northumbria; whereat Sir Hector had great joy, for he had weened his brother dead. Then it was agreed between these two that Sir Hector should ride northward and seek Sir Launcelot, but no word thereof was said to the King, but that Sir Hector had a mind to ride to Corbin, for to seek fresh tidings of his brother.

Now there was at that time at Camelot a youth among the Queen's white knights that was named Percival, and he was the youngest of King Pellinore's sons and brother to the good knight, Sir Lamorak, whom the sons of Lot so foully slew. When Percival learned that Sir Hector was for riding northward, he said :

" Fair sir, I pray you, as you be a courteous knight, that you suffer me to ride with you, for I am full young to ride alone, and yet would I gladly see the world, and right well wot I that I could ride in no better company than thine."

So lightly Sir Hector agreed thereto, and these two set forth from Camelot with their squires behind them, and, within sixteen days, they came to the Castle of Corbin, and there Sir Hector said to Earl Pelles :

" Most noble sir, we have short tidings that my father, King Ban, is lately dead, and, inasmuch as this is a matter which toucheth my brother, Sir Launcelot, closely, I pray you to make known to us shortly where we may find him, for

full well wot we, Sir Earl, that he is on live and within these marches."

Then, for a while, Earl Pelles was in some doubt what he should say, but, in the end, he said :

" Sir Hector, inasmuch as this is a weighty matter and one wherein lie great issues, I will not hide from you that your brother, Sir Launcelot, is on the island which is called Bliant or, as some say, the Fern Island, and there has lain these three years past."

" And how may we best win to this island ? " said Sir Hector.

" You must hie you to the water's edge," said he, " and there wave a cloth three times upon a spear-head, and, anon, will they put forth a barge which will bring you to him."

So they left their squires at the castle, and alone went down to the water's edge, and there they waved a cloth three times upon a spear, as they had been bidden, whereat another cloth waved answer from the island, and, presently, a barge put forth driven by a white sail. So, when the barge drew near to where they stood, they saw that there was in it but one man, and soon Sir Hector saw that it was Haviland. But Haviland looked to find Sir Tristram upon the shore, for none other was there that ever came to the Joyous Isle across the sea ; and none other than he ever waved the cloth three times, for such was the signal agreed between Sir Launcelot and him. Therefore, when he saw that these were strangers, he knit his brow and would have turned the barge about, but Sir Hector cried out on high, " Surely, Haviland, I am not so soon forgotten ! " Whereupon he saw that it was Sir Hector, and then he was very glad and brought the barge to land, and welcomed Sir Hector right joyfully. Then Sir Hector told him of the death of King Ban and of how Sir Launcelot must forthwith to the Kingdom of Guienne, for fear of Claudas, King of Languedoc.

Now the two knights had ridden without squires to the seashore, and this caused some debate between them how they might best keep their horses, and so, in the end, it was agreed between them that Sir Hector should keep watch over the horses and that Sir Percival should to the island alone with Haviland. Thus then they did, and so it was that, as Sir Launcelot stood by the castle wall, looking toward the land, he became aware of a barge which drew near to the island and, in the prow, there stood one all in white armour.

"Surely," said he, "here cometh one of the Queen's knights, but on what errand God only knows."

So he went down to the seashore, and presently there stepped from the barge a youth of some fifteen summers and of a marvellously fair countenance, for his face was that of a maiden rather than of man.

"Fair sir," said Sir Launcelot, "I see that you be of the Queen's knights and, therefore, are you right welcome to this island, what errand soever you may come upon."

"Gramercy of your good words, Sir Launcelot," said the other; "and, so that you may know me, I will not hide from you that I am Percival, the son of King Pellinore, and brother to the good knight, Sir Lamorak."

"Now are you doubly welcome, Sir Percival," said he, "for your father's sons have I ever held in honour and love, and, as for Sir Lamorak, no better knight than he ever laid lance in rest."

"So say all men," said Sir Percival.

"And I dare undertake," said Sir Launcelot, "that you will prove as good a knight as he, when you be come to man's estate."

"Nay, sir," said he, "that in good sooth will I never be, for, as you may plainly see, I am but weakly built; and great mockery of me have had both Sir Mordred and Sir Kay, when I essayed my strength against the other Queen's knights in the lists at Camelot."

"Sir Kay hath ever been a mocker," said Sir Launcelot, "for did he not so mock both Sir Brennor and Sir Gareth, when first they came to Court, and yet two better knights than these have proved no man may wish to see."

"Sir," said Sir Percival, "wit you well that for deeds of arms and the worship of men have I no great will, for the glory to which I cast all my hopes is the glory of God Almighty."

"And truly," said Sir Launcelot, "that were ever the better part, but, alas! few among us there be who can win thereto."

So those two entered into the castle, and there Sir Percival told Sir Launcelot of the death of King Ban, at which he was in truth very sorrowful, for he had no great will, as, at that time, to journey to a far country; and yet full well wist he that from this long journey he might not now escape. Then, as they there sat, there came to them the lady Elaine and her

son, Galahad, and he and Sir Percival looked each upon other with great wonder and joy, as though they read in their hearts of the great glory that would come to both, anon.

So, when they had thus greeted one another, Sir Percival took his leave of that fair fellowship and entered again upon the barge.

"On the second day from now," said Sir Launcelot, "will I be with you at Corbin and then together will we ride southward."

Thus then it fell out, and, within fifteen days of their setting forth, they came to Camelot, and there, I wot, was such joy as never had been seen or heard of because that Sir Launcelot was among them once again and whole in body and mind, for many had deemed him dead or, at the least, out of his mind.

"But, alas!" said the King, "that within so short a time you must go from us once more." And, "Alas! indeed," said the Queen. But Sir Launcelot held silence and, within three days, he sailed for the country of Guienne, and, with him, went all the knights of his kin.

PART III

CHAPTER I

How Sir Galahad came to Camelot all in Red Armour

SIX years and more had King Ban been dead when Sir Launcelot and his kinsmen, with their squires, landed at Rye and rode thence to Winchelsea, where they found lodging with Sir Petipase of that place. There they rested two days, and, on the third day, they rode through the country of Benois to the Castle of Magouns, where it stands nobly above the River Arun. There Sir Bellangere and his mother, the lady Alice, made all that noble fellowship welcome with right good cheer, and there they abode three days, and then rode westward to Camelot, with Sir Bellangere in their company.

Thus, within a while, they came to the palace at Camelot, and, with a great clatter, rode into the courtelage; and there, when the King and Queen saw Sir Launcelot, they wept for joy, for they had no foreknowledge of his coming.

"Sir," said the Queen, when she had well overlooked him, "you are leaner than of yore."

"Truly, madam, am I leaner," said he, "for not without much pain and labour hath my kingdom been established in Guienne; but now is there an end of all war and strife, for King Claudas of Languedoc is dead and my brother, Sir Hector, rules the Kingdom of Guienne in my stead."

"Well," she said, "now that we have you once again, Sir Launcelot, we must do that which we may to keep you among us."

"Thereto am I wholly inclined," said he. "Howbeit, before all else, must I by your goodwill get me to the Castle of Corbin, there to learn how it fareth with my lady Elaine and Galahad, my son."

At that the Queen could scarce hide her anger, but King Arthur said:

"That much could no man deny you, but I pray you, as

you love me, Sir Launcelot, that you make no long tarrying in that far country, for wit you well that, since you sailed from these shores, six years past, full many knights have fallen away from their allegiance, because of the hot violence of my nephews, and none have I, save you, who may once again bring together that most noble fellowship of the Table Round."

"Alas!" said Sir Launcelot, "I am right heavy for these tidings."

"Alas! indeed," said the King, "for now are they but few in number that hold by me. Pellinore's sons, as well you wot, have ever been my foes these ten years past, because of the murder of their father; and now hath my nephew, Gawaine, slain King Brandegore with the thrust of a spear, because of the evil that he spake concerning his daughter, the lady Helen, and Sir Bors; so that the whole country of Gore hath me now in enmity."

Now at these words Sir Bors rose hotly in his place and said:

"My lord, King Arthur, six years have I been from this realm and in a far land. Therefore, I pray you tell me in plain words what evil King Brandegore spake concerning me?"

"Sir Bors," said he, "I may not hide from you that his daughter, the lady Helen, is dead this four years past, and for this he held you in great measure to blame."

Now, when he heard these words, Sir Bors, as the book saith, was so filled with sorrow that he could not speak for weeping, for, as men say, he had very dearly loved the lady Helen. So, when they saw that he was so greatly moved, they rose from their places and, at that time, said no more. Thereafter the King made all Sir Launcelot's kin to disarm them, and, when they had so done, he set before them all manner of meat and wine of the best that he might purvey. So, that night, they all made right good cheer in the Round Hall that was at Camelot.

Then, as they all thus sat at supper in the hall, Sir Launcelot by chance made enquiry concerning Sir Tristram, how he and the lady Isolde fared in the Castle of Joyous Garde, wherein he had so long harboured them; whereat the King said:

"Alas! and alas! Sir Launcelot, that good knight is now no more, to the great sorrow of us all; for, wearying a little, as it is said, of the lady Isolde, Sir Tristram sent a letter to King Mark undertaking that, so he would give him promise

of safe conduct, he would bring the lady Isolde back to Tintagil, and there yield her up. Whereupon King Mark wrote in full friendly wise, bidding him come to Cornwall in all safety and honour. And so, when they were come to Tintagil, King Mark took him by the hand and spake to him soft words of welcome, and then, as Sir Tristram sat that night playing the harp before them, he smote him in the back most foully and unknighly with a glaive, so that he fell down dead at their feet."

Now when he had heard these words Sir Launcelot stood stiffly up in his place and said, so that all might hear :

"My lord, King Arthur, because of that most foul deed, I promise you that I will now ride forthwith into the kingdom of Cornwall and there with my own hand will I slay King Mark, even though it be causer of my own death ; for a truer knight or more valiant in battle than Sir Tristram never laid lance in rest ; and this will I make good upon the body of any that saith the contrary."

Then, as they all looked about them in praise of his purpose, Sir Bellangere, that was lord of the Castle of Magouns, rose up in his place and said :

"My lord, King Arthur, Sir Launcelot, and all this noble fellowship of knights, I require you all, by your knighthood and as ye be true men of honour, that this adventure be mine alone ; for, wit you well, fair sirs, that this King Mark hath aforetime most foully slain both my father, Sir Alisander, and my grandfather, Sir Boudwin ; for which cause I have more against him than any other that beareth life. Wherefore, my lord, Sir Launcelot, I pray you of your courtesy that you withhold you wholly from this matter and let me deal alone, and so will I make promise to this noble fellowship of knights, that, within sixty days from this, either I shall have slain King Mark or he me, and so will Sir Tristram be avenged."

Thereupon Sir Launcelot said :

"Sir, with this am I well content ; for very sure am I that you will honourably achieve that which you have in hand."

So, on the day following, Sir Bellangere took his horse and turned his face for the kingdom of Cornwall ; and, as the book saith, within forty days of his setting forth, he had slain King Mark ; and thenceforth ruled Sir Bellangere over all that country of Cornwall, till the day when he was slain in the last great battle at Camlan.

Now, as the book saith, it so was that, within five days of

his coming to Camelot, Sir Launcelot set forth for the Castle of Corbin; and, when he was there come, he and the lady Elaine, I wot, were like to have gone out of their minds with joy, for they were long strangers.

And of his son, Galahad, trust thou well that Sir Launcelot made great praise, for he was grown tall and broad of the shoulders, and as straight as the stem of a young sycamore tree.

Then, the Castle of Joyous Garde being now void, he placed therein Haviland with a good ward, and, having so done, he bade farewell to the lady Elaine and, with sorrow in his heart, turned him again to the south, being mindful of his promise to the King.

So when Sir Launcelot was again come to Camelot, the King called him to him and said :

"My noble and well-trusted friend, Sir Launcelot, out of all measure am I beholden to you for your many good deeds to me ward, but now would I ask of you the greatest service that I have yet required of you, for I would have you ride forth upon a graceless quest, and that is, in plain words, that you should seek to bring back to their allegiance those lords who are offended with me. And, to this end, I would have you ride first to the country of Gore, and there entreat Sir Meliogrance that, for the love he once bore me, he come to my Court at the feast of Pentecost next coming, for God knows that I had neither part nor will in the slaying of his father, King Brandegore. And, after that you have so dealt with Sir Meliogrance, I would have you ride, through the country of Surluse, to the Castle of Kinkenadan by the Welsh sea, and there, by any means that may be, speak Sir Tor fair, that he too come to Camelot at Pentecost, and with him his brothers, Sir Aglovale and Sir Percival; for wit you well, Sir Launcelot, that I am minded to have there such a gathering of Round Table knights as has not been since the great tourney, eleven years past, when you slew Sir Carados and overthrew Sir Tristram. For, so I can but get them to my Court, then am I well persuaded that they will accord with me readily enough, now that you, Sir Launcelot, are once more come among us; but, so they come not, then will there be enmity between us for evermore, and so will this kingdom fall away from me wholly. And no man is there that lives, Sir Launcelot, who can achieve this, but it be you."

"Sir," said Sir Launcelot, "be in no doubt but that I will

perform this service that you require of me right willingly and gladly, so it be within my compass ; and, God speeding me, I will ensure for you so goodly a gathering of knights at Pentecost as has not heretofore been seen at Camelot since the days when Merlin first built it."

Whereat the King gave him hearty thanks ; and so it was that, two days later, Sir Launcelot rode forth from the palace gate for the country of Gore, with his shield upon his back and with his squire, Wilfran, riding behind him. Thus, within a while, he came to the Castle of Brandegore, and there he made such good weather with Sir Meliogrance, telling him of all the King's anger against Sir Gawaine, and of the whilom love that he had for King Brandegore, that, within a day, he had him bounden by an oath that he would come to Camelot at the feast of Pentecost next. From thence he rode next into the country of Surluse, to the Castle of Pendragon, and there Sir Brennor made him right welcome ; and, as it so fortun'd, there was with him in the castle at the time his brother, Sir Dinadan, and Sir Nerovens, and these three in like wise made promise to come to Camelot at Pentecost.

So, greatly uplifted in mind, Sir Launcelot bade farewell to those three knights and rode forth once more into the west, and, as he rode, about the hour of noon, suddenly, at the passage of a river, he became aware of a knight, bearing a blue and white bended shield, that barred his way. With that Sir Launcelot brought his shield upon his arm and gripped his spear, and in like wise did that other knight, and they made each toward other as men do who seek battle, but, on a sudden, that other knight lifted his spear and turned his horse out of the way, and, when Sir Launcelot drew near, he lightly laughed and said :

" Fair sir, methinketh thou shouldst have some knowledge of this shield that I bear, seeing that it was in thy company for some six or seven days, at such time as thine bore the device of five white stars."

Then Sir Launcelot looked upon him again and knew him for Sir Gileas, and great joy, I ween, had those two, each of other.

" Sir," said Sir Launcelot, " well be ye met, for I looked not to find you in this country."

" Nor I you," said Sir Gileas, " but, wit you well, Sir Launcelot, that this is my own country, wherein I now dwell ; for, so it is that since Sir Plenorius, my father, died, I am

become lord of the Castle of Roche Dure, which is from here but a short journey; and thither I would pray you now, of your good courtesy, to bear me company, that I may make you such good cheer as my castle may be able for."

"Right willingly will I so do," said he, "for I have great will to learn how you have sped these nine years past."

So together they rode to the Castle of Roche Dure, which was a fair and strong castle, and there they did off their helms and Sir Launcelot sat him down right wearily, while Sir Gileas bade them bring wine. So, when they had eaten and drunk, they were well refreshed, and ever, as they there sat, Sir Launcelot questioned the other of the years that had gone by and how they had sped, whether joyfully or the contrary; but never a word would Sir Gileas speak in answer, but there sat smiling, as it were, foolishly. Thus then they sat for a while, and then, on a sudden, there came into the hall a fair lady that smiled very sweetly upon them and that led by the hands two fair children, with whom was a little bratchet that leaped upon them and bayed merrily.

Thereupon Sir Launcelot got to his feet and the lady moved to where he stood and there made courtesy to him down to the ground, at which he was in some part abashed.

"Madam," he said, "it is not seemly that you should so do obeisance before a simple knight."

"Mebeseemeth, my good lord," said she, "that it is indeed seemly, seeing that to you I am beholden for all that I have ever had of joy in life."

Then he looked upon her again, and, thereupon, memory came back to him.

"*Pardie!*" said he, "is it indeed La Belle Sauvage?" whereat she frowned ill-pleased.

"For that name," she said, "I have but little love; but it is indeed the same lady Lindreth whose bonds you loosed at the Bedegraine tourney."

Then was Sir Launcelot very glad and took her by the two hands right joyfully, and praised her beauty, which, as he said, had waxed rather than abated; and, when Sir Gileas was come to them, they all made merry together and the bratchet leaped about them and bayed with gladness because of their gladness. Then presently the lady Lindreth said:

"Sir Launcelot, for all the great joy which has come to us ward, we are in great measure beholden to you, for full well I wot that never, this two hundred years past, hath any

knight dealt so kindly and courteously with foolish damsel as did you with me. For, in honest sooth, I was a very fool and hot for my own undoing, whereof many a knight would have profited."

"Madam," said he, "in very truth you overpraise me, for I dare boldly undertake that every true knight of the Round Table fellowship would have done no less than did I."

"Was I then so cross-eyed and ill-favoured," she asked, and, as she so said, she smiled upon him in like manner as she had done in the Forest of Sherwood.

"Nay," said he, "but very greatly the contrary; and, as for that which I then did, trust thou well, lady Lindreth, that my part therein did me great pain."

"That was indeed manifest from the manner of your parting," said Sir Gileas, laughing; "and this avaunt may you well make, my lady wife, that you made Sir Launcelot to turn tail and flee from you which no man, be he never so strong, hath yet encompassed."

Whereat they all laughed.

"Well, sir," said she, "I am well content that the pain was not with me alone, for very sorely was I plagued because of you, whereunto my lord Sir Gileas can bear witness."

"That can I in good truth," said he, "for such dole as this lady made none ever heard before in all the land. For, wit you well, Sir Launcelot, that, when you departed from us, raging through the forest like one possessed, we knew not how to deal but as you had charged us. And so we got our horses and rode to the Abbey of Belle Aventure, and there were we wed by the abbot, as you required of us. And the armour and some of the horses I bartered with the good monks for food and wine, and so, with three void horses and a great store of victual, we set forth for this country of Surluse. But, first and last, the lady Lindreth wept without ceasing, hanging her head and making such heartlie sorrow as never was heard, for ever she cried on, 'Sir Oswald, oh! Sir Oswald,' till, in the end, I wearied somewhat of her cries and so I turned me to her and said shortly:

"'Fair lady, you may cease your cries, for wit you well that Sir Oswald hath been dead this month past, so that in crying upon him you but lose your breath.' With that she gaped upon me open-mouthed.

"'Dead?' said she.

"'Truly,' said I, 'as dead as King Constantine.'"

“ ‘ But,’ said she, ‘ inasmuch as he was on live yesterday, how can he be dead this month past ? ’

“ ‘ Madam,’ said I, ‘ trust thou well that Sir Oswald hath been dead this month past, for he with whom we but lately parted was not Sir Oswald.’

“ ‘ Who then ? ’ she asked.

“ ‘ The knight who won you in the tourney and then burst away from us through the forest was none other than Sir Launcelot du Lac.’

“ ‘ Sir Launcelot ! ’ she cried, with eyes and mouth agape.

“ ‘ None other,’ said I, ‘ so God me bless.’

“ ‘ Oh ! ’ quoth she, and, with that, her weeping ceased and she turned on me a fairer countenance nor, from that time on, made she any further moan.”

“ Now greatly it marvelleth me,” said Sir Launcelot, “ that, when she wist my name, thereafter she made no further moan.”

“ Nay,” said the lady Lindreth, “ for in what wise could it have profited me to cry after one for whom even Queen Gueneviere wept in vain.”

Now at these words Sir Launcelot rose from his seat and said :

“ Madam, wit you well that I may not sit by and lightly let pass these words ; for had such words been spoken by any knight, and I at hand, I would not have rested till I had done battle with him to the death.”

Then, when she saw his anger and how fiercely he looked upon her, the lady Lindreth fell on her knees before him and said :

“ Oh, Sir Launcelot ! be not thus wrath with me, for I spoke without thought, nor heeding what I said ; and any amends that I may make I pray you put it upon me as penance, and I will fulfil it to the uttermost ; only so you pardon me my foolish words, for as I well understand, they were ill-spoken and unseemly.”

Then Sir Launcelot’s heart was softened and he took her by the hand and raised her to her feet.

“ Fair madam,” said he, “ I cry you mercy, for I was hot and hasty, and full well wot I that you spoke but in jest. Therefore let us speak of it no more, for full loth am I that there should be between us any shadow now that we have thus happily encountered.”

“ And full loth am I,” she said, “ for, wit you well, Sir

Launcelot, that, for this nine years past, there hath fallen no shadow betwixt my lord and me, but ever have we been in great love and amity. And a right worshipful knight withal hath he shown himself and good of his hands; and, for all these things, and for the great joy that hath been between us, are we beholden to you, Sir Launcelot, and so ever will be."

"And therein lies my guerdon," said he, "and as rich a guerdon as any may look for."

So then they spoke of other things and were very merry and glad together, and, presently, there came in Sir Pellagris and Sir Pellandris, that were uncles to Sir Gileas, and they made them great cheer. So, when they were all there together, Sir Launcelot spoke of the message with which the King had charged him, that they should all come to Camelot for the feast of Pentecost next. Whereupon they all made oath upon the body of Christ that they would come, so they were on live.

So, on the morning next following, after that he had broken his fast, Sir Launcelot rode forth, about the hour of undorne, with great joy in his heart because of the joy that had come to Sir Gileas and the lady Lindreth.

Thus, within two days, he came to the Castle of Kinkendan by the sea, and there he found Sir Tor and, with him, Sir Aglovale and Sir Percival, and great joy these three made of him, for they held him in greater love than any man that lived. But when he spoke of that which the King would have, that they should all come to Camelot, then, wit you well, Sir Tor was an ill-pleased man.

"This is a hard thing that you ask of us, Sir Launcelot," he said, "for, at Camelot, there will of a surety be gathered together the five sons of Lot, and, between them and us, there can never be but enmity to the death. And they be five and we but three; and, of those three, our brother Percival availeth us little, for he is more woman than man and holdeth all strife between man to be deadly sin. So, my lord, Sir Launcelot, it is manifest that, should they fall upon us unawares, as they did upon our father and upon our brother, Sir Lamorak, we should be in evil case indeed and our bones would be like to lie at Camelot till the coming of Christ."

"Sir," said Sir Launcelot, "this much will I ensure you: that the sons of Lot shall raise against you neither hand nor voice, and this will I promise you before God."

"Well, Sir Launcelot," said he, "I have been so ill entreated

of the King's nephews that I cast me never more to come to his Court ; but, for the great love I bear unto you, and because of the promise that you have made me this day, I will even do as you would have me and ride to Camelot at Pentecost."

And in like manner said Sir Aglovale and Sir Percival. So Sir Launcelot was right well pleased with Sir Tor and his brothers, and he got his horse and rode thence to Castle Perilous, in Avilion, which is at Glastonbury ; and there he found Sir Gareth dwelling in great love and amity with the lady Lenora. So, when he had spoken with him and told him all the King's will, Sir Gareth made promise that he would so deal with his brothers that between them and the sons of Pellinore there should pass neither angry word nor deed. Also made he promise to come to the Pentecost tourney at Camelot, and in like wise did Sir Gringemour, who was brother to the lady Lenora.

Next, after that, Sir Launcelot rode to the Castle of Pallandour, which is in Logris, and there spoke with Sir Meliot, and he too promised to come to Camelot, and to bring with him all those knights that dwealt near by.

So, within sixty days of his setting forth, Sir Launcelot came back once again to Camelot, and, throughout all those days, was never any found that would meddle with him or stand in his path ; for, when any that were evilly disposed saw the white shield with the three blue lions thereon, wit you well that they passed quickly from his path and were seen no more.

A right joyful man, I trow, was King Arthur of the good tidings that Sir Launcelot brought him of those knights that had fallen away from their allegiance, and great, I wot, was the joy that the King and Queen made of his home-coming ; but, thereat, it is not to be denied that Sir Launcelot had little joy, for more even than heretofore would the Queen have him resort to her and, therefrom, was he ever striving continually ; so that any quest, that was brought thither by any damsel soever, on that he would ride forth readily and gladly, and so keep him in the field as long as he might find means thereto. Now, at this, the Queen was but ill pleased and chafed continually ; and so, upon a day, she came to him in the courtelage of the palace and said in plain words :

" Sir Launcelot, I see and feel daily that thy love to me ward beginneth to slake, for thou hast now no joy to be in my presence, but ever art out of this Court. And quarrels and

matters thou hast nowadays for ladies and gentlewomen more than ever thou hadst aforehand."

"Madam," said he, "they seek me more than aforetime, for now be there but few knights at Court, and, without discourtesy, I may not say these ladies nay."

But, for all his fair words, the Queen looked upon him sourly, for with this answer she was but ill content.

So the winter passed and, when the spring was come, gladdening the hearts of all men, there rode one day into the courtelage of the palace a fair youth of some sixteen summers, all in red armour, and bearing on his shoulder a white shield on which was a red cross. Straight to the centre of the courtelage he rode, and there he sat him silent and still, while all men marvelled who he might be. So word was brought to Sir Launcelot, where he sat in the hall, of the coming of a strange knight in red armour, who would speak no word to any; so, in some wonderment who it might be, he rose from his place and went out into the courtelage, and then he saw that the knight who sat there was his son, Galahad.

Then Sir Launcelot spoke to him angrily.

"Wherefore art thou come hither unbidden?" he said. "For, as thou knowest well, thy mother needeth thy care, and now hath she none to be about her and comfort her."

"Sir," said Galahad, "I am come hither, not of my own will, but following the finger of God, for this hath He required of me, but for what purpose I know not."

So, then Sir Launcelot's anger passed from him and he embraced Galahad and led him into the hall, and there the King and Queen made great joy of him, and the Queen forthwith made him of her white knights.

CHAPTER II

How Sir Launcelot Bore him at the Pentecost Tourney at Camelot

LONG time did the feast of Pentecost that was held in that year dwell in the minds of the good people of Britain, so that, for many years to come, men would speak of it as it had been told to them by their fathers and by their father's fathers. For never again, after that year, as God willed, was it so to be that the goodly fellowship of the Round Table should gather together at Camelot for dancing and minstrelsy and fair jousting in the lists. But of the evil days that were to come upon them all no man had then any foreknowledge, so that, in the palace, all went merrily with the knights and ladies there assembled.

Of these, as the book saith, there was at that time a goodlier gathering than any that had there met together since that Sir Launcelot had ridden in from Corbin twelve years before.

Now, the jousts that had been cried for this feast were, as may well be understood, in all men's mouths, for, with so great a gathering of knights assembled there, they looked for such tilting as, of late years, had not been seen among them; and, in especial, did they speak of Sir Launcelot, whether his might of old had endured or whether others, such as Sir Brenner or Sir Gareth or Sir Meliot, would prove overmuch for him. But, for the most part, men said that none would be found to hold the field against Sir Launcelot. In this wise, then, wagged men's tongues, and women's too, till came the first day appointed for the jousts: but, on that day, for all the entreaties that were made to him, Sir Launcelot held aloof and would not tilt, so that many held it to his shame.

Then, on the day next following, the King came to him and said:

"Sir Launcelot, I pray you, as you love me, that you hold aloof no longer from the jousting, but that you ride your horse into the lists, as you were wont to do in days of old

and there do of your best against all that may cross your path, else will men surely say that your might hath left you, and that were ill for us all."

"My lord, King Arthur," said Sir Launcelot, "for the idle tongues of men I care no more than for the whistling of the wind in the tree-tops, and meseemeth, withal, I have had my full share of such worship as men win with sword and spear. Howbeit, an you so require me, I will get my horse and join me in the medley, but, wit you well, sir, that I have no great will thereto."

"Well, do as ye list," said the King, "for full loth would I be to drive you whither you would not."

So Sir Launcelot got his horse and rode into the lists, and, at the first, for to please the King, he overthrew some few knights that he encountered; but, when he saw how gallantly Sir Meliot de Logris bore him in the medley, he called to mind their friendly joustings of old in the Warwell Woods and, thereafter, he put not forth his full strength, so that Sir Meliot won the prize.

Then was the Queen very wrath and she came to Sir Launcelot and said:

"Full well wot I, my lord, Sir Launcelot, that you put not forth your full strength in the medley, else had Sir Meliot never won the prize. Therefore, sir, forget it not that there yet remaineth one day more of these jousts; and I require you, Sir Launcelot, as ye be a true knight, that, for my greater honour, you win for me this prize. For never, since you won for me the golden platter that King Arthur gave when first you came hither from Corbin, hath any knight laid prize at my feet, whereby I be in some part shamed. Now, therefore, I pray you win for me this prize; and so shall all the ladies and gentlewomen that are at Court hold me in envy."

Then was Sir Launcelot fully resolved to do his uttermost on the day following, and so, when the hour came, he rode into the lists with his shield upon his arm; but so it was that, when he saw how nobly Sir Gareth bore him, he found it not in his heart to put forth his full strength; and so he held aloof and hoved upon the outskirts of the fray, and Sir Gareth won the prize; whereat the Queen was so greatly offended that she would speak no word to Sir Launcelot that day, but ever turned her back upon him before all the Court. When men saw this, they said:

"*Certes*, now that Sir Launcelot's might hath left him, which is very manifest to us all, the Queen hath turned her face from him." And so said all they that were there assembled.

CHAPTER III

How Sir Galahad Sat in the Siege Perilous and of all that
Came Therefrom

NOW, as it so came about, there befell at Camelot on that same day so strange a happening that all else was swept clear from men's minds, as the mist in the valley is swept away by the wind from the sea. For, as they all sat at meat that evening in the Round Hall, on a sudden there entered in upon them Sir Launcelot's son, Galahad, who had put from him his red armour and was now all in the white armour of the Queen's knights. Thus, before them all, he came into the hall and, turning his eye neither to the right hand nor to the left, and speaking no word to any, he got him straightway to the Siege Perilous, wherein no man had sat since the building of the palace, and thereon sat him boldly down.

Now, upon this, all that were there seated rose to their feet in great dismay, for they marvelled beyond measure how that any durst sit in that siege without grievous peril to himself and all others that were there assembled. But, when there followed on this perilous deed no sign of wrath from heaven, then, within a while, they sat them down again, for so the King commanded; but still they marvelled greatly how one that was so tender of years and not yet a knight of the Round Table durst do that for which no man among them all had yet had the hardihood.

"It passeth all," said Sir Kay, "that one who is not yet of our fellowship should thus avaunt himself as the better of us all."

And so thought the greater part of those knights that there sat at meat. Thus, as they all sat wondering and with anger and heat in their hearts, there came through the window of the hall the last ray of the setting sun, rosy-red and sweeping clean across the hall from wall to wall, and, following this, there came a great noise of thunder, so fierce and loud that to many it seemed as though the very palace itself would fall in twain. Thereupon Galahad, when he saw that sunray

pass in this wise through the hall, rose to his feet and there stood gazing upward as one who sees hidden things.

"What see ye, Galahad?" said the King. "For in truth I see nothing but a beam of the setting sun that crosseth the hall."

"Sir and fair lords," said Galahad, "wit you well that, when that loud thunder sounded in our ears, I saw the Holy Sangreal that passed slowly through the hall from side to side upon the sunbeam, but the Cup itself, alas! I saw not, for that it was shrouded in white samite."

"Saw any other this miracle?" said the King.

"I saw it," said Sir Percival.

"And I too saw it," said Sir Bors.

Then others thought that they too had seen it, till, in the end, there was scarce one sitting there but thought in his heart that he had seen it.

"This is a strange and wondrous thing that has befallen us," said the King, "and the half of my kingdom would I gladly give to know the true interpretation thereof."

"My lord and king," said Galahad, "for guerdon great or small in this matter I have no great will; howbeit I may not withhold from you the interpretation of this vision, and therefore, wit you well, my lord, King Arthur, that the Sangreal passed into this hall and out again for no other cause but that we should follow. And this do I now, by the grace of God, prophecy before you all: that if there be found, among all the knights here assembled, six who are worthy to see the Holy Cup, then shall thy kingdom, my lord, King Arthur, stand; but, if there be not found six worthy, then shall thy kingdom fall and the heathen overrun the land."

When he had thus made an end of speaking, he sat him down once more upon the Siege Perilous and, for a long while, there fell on that noble company a great silence, for no man that was there doubted but that Galahad's words were from heaven because that, as he spoke, his face shone as that of an angel. Then, on a sudden, while all men sat in doubt, Sir Gawaine leaped to his feet and drew his sword from its sheath, and then he cried out in a loud voice:

"My lord, King Arthur, and all this fair fellowship of knights, before you all, and in the sight of God, I here make avow, that to-morn, without longer abiding, I shall set forth from this palace of Camelot and, thereafter, labour in the quest of the Sangreal for a twelvemonth and a day, or more if

need be, and never shall I return again unto this Court until such time as I shall have seen it more openly than it hath been seen of us here this day."

Then, when he had so said, all those other knights that were there arose and said likewise, whereupon the King made great moan and, turning to Sir Gawaine, he said :

"Alas ! Sir Gawaine, ye have nigh slain me with this avow that ye have made ; for, through this, ye have bereft me of the fairest fellowship and the truest of knighthood that ever were seen together in any realm of the world. For, when they depart from hence, very sure am I that they shall never meet more in this world, for many shall die in this quest. And so it forethinketh me a little, for I have loved them as well as my life, and so this departing is as though my very life were reft from me."

But no avail was there in any moan that the King might make, for they were all under a vow, and that might not be broken. So, on the day following, all that great assemblage of knights rode forth on the quest of the Sangreal, each going whither the spirit might lead him ; but, before that they went forth, they all met together in St. Stephen's Church, and there King Arthur made Sir Galahad a knight of the Table Round and likewise did he to Sir Lovel and Sir Florence, that were sons to Sir Gawaine and the lady Ettarre. Then they all heard Mass with great solemnity and thereafter they rode forth.

CHAPTER IV

How Sir Galahad Achieved the Sangreal and Died in the Town of Gethrin

NOW it is well known to all men that, on this quest of the Sangreal, Sir Launcelot rode forth alone and fully resolved was he in his heart that, in the end, his quest should lead him to the Castle of Corbin ; but, for the salving of his conscience, that it should not be said of him that he had ridden straight to that place to which he would come in the end, he turned his horse's head towards the country of Gore, and, anon, he came within those marches and put up his horse at a hostry. Then, upon the day next following, he set forth once more, riding whither his horse would have him go, for, in such a quest, it is manifest that one path profiteth no more than another. So, as he rode this way and that, with no certain purpose in his mind, he chanced upon Sir Ewen, who rode upon the same quest as all those other knights of the Round Table ; and, when they had saluted each the other, Sir Ewen would have had Sir Launcelot go with him to the Castle of Beauregard, where dwelt his father and mother. To this Sir Launcelot assented readily enough, for he had a mind to speak with King Uriens touching his allegiance to the King ; for, as the book saith, King Uriens had not been amongst those that came to Camelot at Pentecost, whereat some had shaken their heads dismally ; for, though all men held King Uriens to be a true knight and loyal to the King, of Sir Ewen they had no such full surety, for of him some said one thing and some another ; but in this were they all agreed that he was ever swayed this way and that between his father and his mother. Howbeit, for all these contrary reports, Sir Launcelot held him in trust and amity, for he ever hoped by the use of fair persuasion to win him to the side of the King against his mother. When, therefore, Sir Ewen bade Sir Launcelot to the Castle of Beauregard, he went with him nothing loth, for, if he might not by this means the more readily achieve the Sangreal, yet, as it seemed to him, might he thereby at the least work some good service for the King.

So, within a little, they came to the castle and entered therein, and there they unlaced their helms and sat them down in the hall, while men brought wine and food. But, all this while, King Uriens came not into their presence, nor made no sign, for, as well Sir Ewen wist, when he bade Sir Launcelot go with him, King Uriens was not at that time within the castle, having fled some ten days past to the Castle of Brandegore for fear of Queen Morgan le Fay, his wife, who had great will to destroy him. But, of all this, Sir Ewen had told him nothing, for at that time he was plotting treason against King Arthur with his mother, and it was therefore of no goodwill to Sir Launcelot that he had bidden him to come with him to the Castle of Beauregard.

So, when they had there sat a little while, he rose from his place and went to his mother and said :

“ Sir Launcelot is below, seated in the hall.”

Then, when she heard this, was Morgan le Fay glad beyond measure, and straightway she went to where Sir Launcelot sat, and, when he rose to greet her, she passed her hand quickly before his face and cried out :

“ Close your eyes, Sir Launcelot.”

At that his eyes straightway closed as though in sleep, whereupon she called her servants, and they stripped him of his armour and of his shirt and breeches, and clothed him in filthy rags, as she required them. When this was done, she stood before him with scorn in her eyes and said :

“ Fellow, thy name is Hogrel, and thou art my swineherd, and ever hast been my swineherd. Now open thine eyes and go tend thy swine.”

Thereupon Sir Launcelot opened his eyes, and they put a staff in his hand and he went forth full meekly and tended the swine ; and so did he daily for the space of two years. And, throughout all that time, he deemed not but that he was a swineherd and that Hogrel was his name ; for daily would Morgan le Fay pass her hand before his face and speak these words in his ear.

Then, when two years had passed, it chanced, upon a day, that men bore Sir Ewen into the castle sore wounded, for the truncheon of a spear was in his side. And this spear, as men said, was Sir Gawaine's spear, for—as the book saith—these two had met in the forest and—neither knowing other—had hurtled together to the grievous hurt of Sir Ewen. But others there were, and these of the wisest, who said that

Sir Gawaine had slain him of intent, because that he was plotting treason against King Arthur. So, when Sir Ewen was brought into the castle, Queen Morgan le Fay was as one distraught and like to go out of her mind for sorrow, but none of the arts that she used availed her anything to save her son and, on the fourth day, he died.

Now, through all that time that Sir Ewen lay sick and wounded, Queen Morgan le Fay thought not at all upon her swineherd, and so, day by day, the sorcery that she had laid upon him weakened and, abated; and, in the end, he knew himself for what he was. Then he looked about him, where he stood among the swine, and a great anger seized him, for memory of where he was came back to him. With that he turned him to the castle, and, when the porter and some of the ward would have stayed him, he smote them down to right and left with his naked hands and so passed in. Then, wot you, he was a right glad man, for within the hall he found his shield and armour, and, when he had put that upon him, he went to the stables and there saddled his horse, with none gainsaying him, for they were all greatly adread of his might, and so he rode forth across the drawbridge and was gone.

Now, it was two full years since Sir Launcelot had first come to the Castle of Beauregard, but of this he knew nothing, but thought that it had been but a day, and so, in great gladness of heart that he had left behind him Queen Morgan le Fay and all her sorceries, he turned his horse's head towards the north and so rode for twelve days without adventure. Then, on the day next following, he came to the country of Sarra, which was his own country, and there, at a town which is called Gethrin, he found a great stir of people, with men running to and fro in hot haste as though they were distraught.

"Why make ye all this stir?" he asked.

"My lord," they told him, "there lieth at the nunnery a young knight like to die, and so men run to and fro seeking the abbot, that he may receive his Creator before the breath hath passed from him.

"Now will I see this young knight," said Sir Launcelot, and with that he turned him to the nunnery, and, when he was there come, he beat upon a postern door with the pommel of his sword. Then, within a while, they opened to him, but the nuns knew him not, because of the years that he had been

gone from that land ; so they abashed their heads before him and prayed him that he would come to that sick knight with all speed. So he entered into a little white chamber, and there, upon a bed, lay his son, Sir Galahad, white and wan as though he had been a wraith.

"Galahad!" cried Sir Launcelot, "who hath thus smitten thee, and where art thou wounded?"

"Good my lord," said the nuns, "he hath no wound upon him nor any other hurt, but, because that he ever refuseth food, from very faintness hath he come to this state, and now is he like to die beneath our hands."

"But to what end doth he thus refuse food?" he asked of them.

"My lord," they told him, "in truth we know not, but men say that it is a penance for sin that he hath put upon him."

At that Sir Launcelot made a great outcry.

"Wit ye well, fair sisters," said he, "that this young knight who lieth here before you is as sinless as the angels in heaven."

"That may we truly believe," they said, "but, as it is whispered, this penance is not for his own sins but for those of his father, which are very grievous."

Now, when he heard this, Sir Launcelot groaned as a man groans when he is sore stricken with a spear and he said:

"Fair sisters, I prithee leave us for a season, for I have somewhat for this young knight's ear."

So they went out and left those two together, and then Sir Launcelot fell on his knees beside the bed and said:

"Galahad, my son, wherefore hast thou done this?"

"I did it for the chastisement of the flesh," said he, "and well am I rewarded therefor, for, wit ye well, my father, that I have achieved the Sangreal."

"The Sangreal!" Sir Launcelot cried. "Hast thou then indeed seen it?"

"Truly did I see it," said he; "rosy red it was, and full of glory, and with it came such sweet music to my ears as never man yet heard."

"And saw any others this holy sight?"

"As to that I know not," said Sir Galahad. For, at that time, it had not yet come to the ears of men that Sir Percival, too, had achieved the Sangreal. None other than these two saw the Cup itself, but as the book saith, Sir Bors came nigh to seeing it, for it floated before his eyes, but covered with

white samite ; for the Cup itself he might not see, because of the lady Helen, who was daughter to King Brandegore.

Thus, for a while, those two rested in silence ; but, about the hour of evensong, Sir Galahad opened his eyes and smiled as smile the angels of God.

"My lady mother," he said. Whereupon Sir Launcelot smote himself upon the chest and said :

"Fool and sluggard that I have been, that I bethought me not to send for thy lady mother, for it is but a short two leagues from here to Corbin."

"What need is there to send," said Sir Galahad, "seeing that she is even now here with us? See how sweetly she smiles and holds out her arms to me. Never have I seen her so passing fair."

But Sir Launcelot, when he looked about him, could see nothing but the white walls and the window of the chamber that looked northward towards Lowick. So he turned him again to Sir Galahad, and then he truly saw that he was dead, but his eyes were open and they looked with great gladness on things which were far away.

So he called to him the nuns, and they closed Sir Galahad's eyes and lit candles at his head ; and all this while Sir Launcelot held silence and sat with his head bowed upon his knees ; but, when they spoke of burial in the nunnery, then he held silence no longer, but lifted up his head and said :

"As to burial, ye may spare your pains, for, wit you well, fair sisters, that nowhere but in Joyous Garde shall this young knight lie."

"Who then be you, sir, that speak thus boldly?" they asked of him.

"I am Sir Launcelot du Lac," said he, "and this dead knight is Sir Galahad, my son."

"Sir," they said, "we fear that you have greatly sinned, and that, for your sins, this sorrow hath come upon you."

"Fair sisters," said he, "that which I have done is between me and my Saviour, and to none other will I render account." Whereat they were abashed and left him. So, for that night, he lodged in the hostry and, on the day following, he rode to the Castle of Corbin and there Eric greeted him full sorrowfully.

"Alas ! alas ! my good lord," he said, "that you came not hither yesterday ; for it is now seven days past since my lady was stricken of a fever and, for all that we could do to the

contrary, yesterday, about the hour of evensong, her spirit left her."

Then was Sir Launcelot's heart like to break with sorrow that, within one day, he was thus bereft of wife and son ; and all that night he sat beside the bed, whereon his lady lay, as one without understanding, for no words could his mouth frame. But then, on the day following, Earl Pelles brought him away, for they would make her ready for the burial.

Then, two days later, they all came to Joyous Garde, and there, in the courtelage of the castle, were gathered together all the lords, knights, ladies, and gentlewomen of Northumbria ; and, when all these were assembled in the chapel, then they laid the lady Elaine and Sir Galahad to rest side by side beneath the great stone which is in the nave. Then, when they had put back the stone, Sir Launcelot took a cushion and knelt upon it, above the stone where they lay, and then he said before them all :

" Here lieth the sweetest lady and the fairest that ever drew breath in this sorrowful world, and with her lieth her most noble son, and, because that they were dearer to me than any that ever bore life, I hereby make a vow before all that are here assembled that, in what part of the world soever I may die, my body shall be brought hither, if it be within the compass of my kin, and laid beside these two, my wife and my son, there to lie till the day when Christ shall summon us to rise."

And so, when he had made an end of speaking, all who were there present said " Amen."

CHAPTER V

How Sir Patrick Fell down Dead at the Dinner which the Queen Made at Westminster

FOR sixteen days Sir Launcelot rode southward to Camelot, and there he found King Arthur greatly cast down because that, of all those knights who had set forth on the quest of the Sangreal, two only had achieved it, to wit, Sir Galahad and Sir Percival ; and therefore, as it seemed to him, must his kingdom fall from him, for so had Sir Galahad prophesied.

But Sir Kay, who sought to comfort him, said :

" Sir, as for me, it rejoiceth me greatly that but two of our fellowship were esteemed worthy to see this Holy Grail ; for, wit you well, my lord, King Arthur, death came speedily to both those two knights who achieved it, so that, had many seen it, our Round Table would have been void indeed ! "

This he said because of the bruit of Sir Percival's death, which, as the book saith, followed quickly on that of Sir Galahad, and which was now well known to all men.

As for the Queen, she made no such great moan, but, contrariwise, was full of gladness because of the death of the lady Elaine, for to herself she said :

" Surely now will Sir Launcelot turn to me ward " ; and, if that were so as she would have it, then for the fall of kingdoms had she but little thought. But Sir Launcelot went about his ways sadly, and ever kept him from the Queen's path, at which, at the first, she made no such great sorrow, for, within herself, she thought :

" It is full soon yet ; for his grief is still new, but anon, when the wound in his heart is healed, then he will surely turn to me. "

So, for three months, she waited patiently, but, all that time, he came not near her but as courtesy required, and ever was he sad and sorrowful, nor, when she smiled upon him, did he make answer. So, upon a day, she said to him, when there were none others within hearing :

"Meseemeth, Sir Launcelot, that thou hast for me none of the love that thou hadst aforetime."

"Lady Gueneviere," said he, "wit you well that I may love no lady till the day I die, for that is my firm resolve before God. For so did I vow in my heart when I laid the lady Elaine to rest in the chapel at Joyous Garde. For, wit you well, lady Gueneviere, that, when my son Galahad died, her spirit came to the nunnery where he lay and led him away to Paradise smiling; and so, by the grace of God, may she yet lead me thither, when my hour comes. And soothly, as I believe, my son Galahad died for my sins, and, therefore, for this cause, and for the cleansing of my soul, if may be, I put upon me this penance, that I will love no lady till the day I die."

All this while the Queen stood still and let Sir Launcelot say what he would. And then, when he had all said, she burst out on weeping, and so she sobbed and wept a great while. Then, when she might speak, she said:

"Sir Launcelot, now I well understand that thou art a false, recreant knight, and that, beneath this pretence, thou hidest thy love for other ladies, and of me thou hast but disdain and scorn. Therefore trust thou well that henceforth shall I never love thee no more, nor look upon thy face. Therefore, see to it that thou never be so hardy as to come within my sight from this day on. Right here I discharge thee this Court, that thou never come within it more, upon pain of thy head."

Wherewith she turned on her heel and left him. Now, as the book saith, Sir Launcelot had great sorrow when the Queen so spoke, for never had he looked to offend her beyond remedy. So, not knowing how best to deal, he took counsel of his cousin, Sir Bors, and told him all that the Queen had said.

"Well, good my cousin," said Sir Bors, "it is very plain to the understanding that you must avoid this Court, but, by mine advice, ye shall not depart out of this near country as at this time; for women, in their hastiness, will do oft-times that which sore repenteth them thereafter; therefore, by mine advice, ye shall forthwith unto your horse and ride to Windsor to the good hermit, Sir Brastias, that was one time a good knight unto King Arthur, and to his father, Uther Pendragon, before him; and there shall you abide till I send you word of better tidings."

"Alas!" said he, "I fear I have offended past forgiveness."

"Dismay you not," said Sir Bors, "for many a time ere this hath the Queen been wrath with you, and, after, she was the first that repented it."

"Ye say well," said Sir Launcelot, "and, as ye have counselled me, so will I do."

So he took his horse and rode to Sir Brastias at Windsor, and there he lay for a twelvemonth, but none at the Court, save Sir Bors only, wist where he had become.

Now, it so was that, in the year next following, King Arthur went to Westminster, which is in London, and all the Court went with him; and, because that the Court had not been there for many a year past, and because she had great joy of being there, the Queen let make a privy dinner to some of the knights that were there assembled with the Court. And the knights that she bade to the dinner were these: Sir Gawaine, Sir Agravaine, Sir Gaheris, Sir Mordred, Sir Gareth, Sir Bors, Sir Blamor, Sir Bleboris, Sir Persant, Sir Ironside, Sir Brennor, Sir Patrick, Sir Mador, Sir Pinel, Sir Gileas, Sir Lionel, Sir Palomides, Sir Safere, Sir Branadil, Sir Kay, Sir Astamor, Sir Meliot, Sir Pelleas, and Sir Colgrevice. These four and twenty knights dined with the Queen in a chamber that was appointed therefore, and before them were set all manner of dainties. Now, Sir Gawaine had a custom that he used daily, at dinner and at supper, that he loved well all manner of fruit and, in especial, apples and pears. Therefore, whosoever dined or feasted Sir Gawaine, would commonly purvey for good fruit for him; and so did the Queen, for, to please Sir Gawaine, she let purvey for him of all manner of fruit, for Sir Gawaine was a passing hot knight of nature. The feast then being near ended, Sir Patrick did chance to take and eat an apple, and, when he had so done, he swelled up suddenly and greatly, and then fell down dead before them all. At this every knight that was there leapt from the table ashamed and wrath, for they wist not what to say; for, seeing that the Queen had made that feast, they all had great suspicion unto her.

"My lady Queen," said Sir Gawaine, "wit ye well that these apples were purveyed for me, for all folks that know my conditions understand that I love well fruit; and now I see well I had near been slain. Therefore, madam, I dread lest ye will be shamed."

Then the Queen stood still, and was so sore abashed that she wist not what to say.

"By my head!" said Sir Mador, "this shall not here be ended, for I have lost a full noble knight of my blood, and, therefore, upon this shame and despite, I will be avenged to the uttermost."

So there, openly before them all, Sir Mador accused the Queen of the death of his cousin, Sir Patrick. Then they all stood still and none of them would say a word, for they had a great suspicion unto the Queen, because that she had let make that dinner. And, as for her, she was so abashed that nothing could she do but weep. And, while they all so stood, King Arthur came suddenly into the room, for the noise of what had befallen had come to his ears.

"My lord, King Arthur," cried Sir Mador, "I claim justice upon the Queen for the death of my noble kinsman, Sir Patrick; for, wit ye well, my lord, that there is not one of the four and twenty knights that were bidden to this dinner but they have all great suspicion unto the Queen. What say ye all, my lords?"

Then they answered one and all that they could not excuse the Queen, for she had made that dinner and either it must have come by her or by her servants.

"Alas!" said the Queen, "I made this dinner for a good intent, and never for none evil, so God Almighty help me!"

"My lord," said Sir Mador, "I require you, as ye be a righteous king, that you give me a day whereon I may have justice."

"Well," said the King, "I give you the day fifteen days from now, that you be ready armed on horseback in the meadow beside Westminster; and, if it so fall that there be any knight to encounter with you, then mayest thou do the best, and God speed the right. And, if it so fall that there be no knight ready at that day, then must my Queen be burned, and there shall she be ready to have her judgment."

"I am content," said Sir Mador, and so passed out; and likewise did all those other knights. Then, when the King and Queen were alone together, the King asked her how the matter had befallen.

"So God me help," she said, "I wot not how nor in what manner."

"Where is Sir Launcelot?" asked the King. "An he were here, he would not grudge to do battle for you."

"Sir," said the Queen, "I wot not where he is; but his brothers and his kinsmen are assured that he is not within this realm."

"That me repenteth," said King Arthur, "for, an he were here, he would soon stint this strife; but, sith we know not his whereabouts, I would counsel you that you require Sir Bors that he do battle for you, for he hath ever been well inclined to you ward."

"That will I in good sooth do," said the Queen, "but I misdread me much that he is not big enough for Sir Mador, whom all men esteem a passing good knight. And it was for this cause, I wot well, that those four and twenty knights stood aside, for, had he been a lesser man, then would the most of them have done battle for me."

"Well," said the King, "Sir Bors is a good enough knight for most that be, and, be that as it may, we have none better to hand; but it marvelleth me much, madam, that you could not keep Sir Launcelot at your side."

CHAPTER VI

How Sir Launcelot Fought Sir Mador for the Queen's Life

SO, one day followed upon another and, with every day that passed, the certainty grew that the Queen was to blame for the death of that knight. Howbeit, there were yet some who whispered that the death of Sir Patrick was not the Queen's doing but was the work of the lady Allowrie, who was daughter unto Sir Kay, the seneschal; for, as all men knew, she had great despite unto Sir Gawaine because that, after he had taken her from Sir Dinadan, whom he slew in fair fight during the quest of the Sangreal, his eye now passed her by and lighted on another; so that some there were who bore witness that they had heard her say openly that she would, by some means or another, compass the death of Sir Gawaine; and, being as she was the daughter of the seneschal, it was well known to all men that she came and went as she pleased among the meats and fruits. Wherefore there were those who said that this matter lay at the door of the lady Allowrie, and that it were more fitting that she should be burned than the Queen. Howbeit they held their peace and said nothing openly, for there was not one of them but had some despite unto the Queen, because they held, one and all, that Sir Launcelot avoided the Court for her sake. So the Queen sent for Sir Bors and said:

"Sir, will ye succour me in this matter."

"Madam," said he, "what would you that I did? For I may not, with the goodwill of my fellows, do as I would in this matter, for dread lest they might have me in suspicion. Therefore, madam, I marvel me how, for shame, you dare require me to do anything for you, inasmuch as you have chased my noble kinsman, Sir Launcelot, out of this country."

"Alas, fair knight!" said the Queen, "I put me wholly in your grace, an all that is done amiss I will amend as you will counsel me."

And therewith she kneeled down upon both her knees and besought Sir Bors to have mercy upon her.

"Or," she said, "I will have a shameful death, and thereto I never offended."

Right so came King Arthur and found the Queen kneeling before Sir Bors. Then Sir Bors raised her up and said to her :

"Madam, ye do me great dishonour."

"Ah, gentle knight!" said the King, "have mercy upon my Queen, for I am well nigh in certainty she is untruly defamed. Therefore I require you, of your knighthood, Sir Bors, that you do battle for her."

"My lord," said Sir Bors, "you require of me the greatest thing that any man can require of me, and, wit you well, an I grant to do battle for the Queen, I shall wrath many of my fellowship of the Round Table. Howbeit, for the love I bear to you, and for the love I bear to Sir Launcelot, I will, at that day, be the Queen's champion, unless that there come by adventure a better knight than I am to do battle for her."

"Will ye promise me this by your faith?" said the King.

"Yes, sir," said Sir Bors, "of that will I not fail you."

Then were the King and Queen passing glad and thanked him very heartily, and so departed.

So, on the morning following, while it was yet dark, Sir Bors took his horse secretly, and so made over to Sir Launcelot, where he lay at Windsor with the hermit, Brastias; and there those two cousins had great joy, each of other, and afterwards Sir Bors told him of the great peril that was toward the Queen, that she should be burned on the appointed day, if there were found none to be her champion and to overcome Sir Mador.

"Now," said Sir Launcelot, "this has fallen out as I would have had it. Therefore, my fair cousin, I pray you, on the day, make you ready to do battle with Sir Mador, but look that ye tarry as long as ye may till ye see me come, for I will by no means fail you."

At that Sir Bors was passing glad, for now he wist of a surety that Sir Launcelot would do battle for the Queen in his stead; so he bade Sir Launcelot farewell and came again to the Court in London. Now here it was freely noised about that Sir Bors had assented to do battle for the Queen on the appointed day, wherefore many knights were displeased with him, for there were but few knights in the Court but they deemed that the Queen was in the wrong, and that she had done that treason; and hottest of all against the Queen was

Sir Kay, for he feared for his daughter. Then Sir Bors made his answer there to all those other knights.

"My fair lords," he said, "wit ye well that it were shame to us all, an we suffered the most noble Queen of the world to be shamed openly, seeing that her lord and our lord is the man of most worship in all the world, and the most christened."

Then Sir Kay answered him :

"As for our most noble King, Arthur, we love him and honour him as well as ye do ; but, as for Queen Gueneviere, we love her not, for that she is a destroyer of good knights."

"Fair lords," said Sir Bors, "meseemeth ye say not as ye should say, for never in my days heard I that she was a destroyer of any good knights, and to good knights she hath ever been large and free of her goods ; and, therefore, I say it were shame to us all to stand aside and see her put to a shameful death."

Thereat, as the book saith, some of those there present were well pleased and others not so well pleased.

So the day came on fast on which the battle should be, and, on the eve thereof, the Queen sent for Sir Bors and asked him how he was disposed.

"Truly, madam," said he, "I am disposed in like wise as I promised you, that is to say, I shall not fail you unless, by adventure, there come a better knight than I am to do battle for you."

So this the Queen told unto the King, who said :

"Have ye no doubt of Sir Bors, for I call him now one of the best knights of the world."

So the Queen was in part comforted, but still had she some misease, for in her heart she believed that Sir Mador was too big a knight for Sir Bors, and so would she be burned.

Then, at last, came the day when she was to suffer, and the King and all the Court and a great multitude of people went into the meadows below Westminster.

Then, when they were all there assembled, the constable brought forth the Queen and placed her within the ward ; and there they stripped her to her smock, and she stood before them all white and trembling ; and, close without the ward was an iron stake driven into the ground with faggots piled about it.

Thus they stood for a while, and then Sir Mador came and made oath before the King that the Queen did this treason unto his cousin, Sir Patrick ; and his oath, he said, he would

prove with his body, hand to hand with any that said the contrary. Then came Sir Bors and said :

"As for the Queen, she is in the right, and that will I make good with my hands."

"Then make thee ready," said Sir Mador, "and we shall prove whether thou be in the right or I."

"Sir Mador," said Sir Bors, "wit ye well I know you for a good knight, but I trust to God I shall be able to withstand your malice ; but this much have I promised my lord, King Arthur, and my lady Queen, that I will do battle for her to the uttermost, unless that there come a better knight than I am to discharge me."

"Leave talking," said Sir Mador, "and make thee ready, or else say me nay."

"Take your horse," said Sir Bors, "and, as I suppose, ye shall not tarry long but ye shall be answered."

Then either departed to their tents and made them ready, as they thought best ; and, anon, Sir Mador came into the field with his shield upon his shoulder and his spear in his hand, and so rode about the meadow crying out unto King Arthur :

"Bid your champion come forth, an he dare."

Then was Sir Bors ashamed, and took his horse and came to the end of the lists, whereupon a pursuivant read the accusations against the Queen and, even as he read, all those knights and ladies suddenly became aware of a knight on a white horse, bearing a veiled shield, that came riding slowly toward them from out of a wood near by. So this knight rode up to Sir Bors, and said in the hearing of them all :

"Fair sir, be not displeased, I pray you, but let me have this battle, for, wit ye well, I have made this day a right great journey for to have this battle, and, therefore, I pray you, withdraw ye and let me deal."

At this there was a great stir among all those that were there met, and the King called the stranger knight to him, and enquired of him if he were ready to do battle for the Queen.

"Therefore am I come hither," he said, "and, therefore, I pray you, tarry me not ; for I have other matters on hand and must speed me away when this matter be concluded."

"*Pardie !*" said Dagonet, the jester, when he heard this, "this knight of the white horse looketh further before him than some would, were they to meet Sir Mador with tipped spears ; for this, Sir Mador, as all may see, is a big knight and

well-made withal, and of his horse he hath a very sure mastery."

"Let be," said the King, "for meseemeth this knight's bearing is not wholly strange to me."

"Jesu!" said Dagonet, "can it indeed be he?"

"I know not," said the King; but to himself he smiled well pleased; and, as for the Queen, from the first moment that her eyes had lighted upon that strange knight, she knew him for Sir Launcelot, and, whereas she had not as yet shed so much as one tear, when she knew that it was Sir Launcelot, she wept as though her heart would burst; so that all men said:

"In this new knight that cometh on the field she hath but little faith, for see how she weeps at his coming."

But, in good sooth, it was not for fear that she wept, but because of the fullness of her heart.

So now came the time when those two knights should encounter, and, when they came to the far ends of the lists, they turned their horses about and hurtled together right fiercely, so that Sir Mador's spear broke upon the other knight's shield, but he himself was borne over backwards horse and all, so that many thought that he was sped. Howbeit, within a little, he was so far recovered that he avoided his horse, and stood upon his feet, and then he called upon the stranger knight to draw his sword. So that knight leaped lightly from his horse and drew his sword, and then those two lashed at one another with their swords like two men possessed. But, after a while, as was manifest to all those that looked upon the battle, Sir Mador's breath began to fail him and his strokes grew fainter, whereupon the other smote him to the ground with a great buffet, and then, standing above him, bade him, as he would save his life, let cry to all the world that the Queen was blameless of that treason. But to that knight's words Sir Mador made no answer, but, as he there stood unguarded above him, he smote him most foully from below with his sword and pierced his thigh. Whereupon the other cleft Sir Mador's helm with one stroke, so that he fell back dead, and the knight's partners of the lists lifted him up and bore him to his tent.

Thus then, before all men, was the Queen's innocence clearly proven, and she was loosed from the constable's ward and ran unto the King, and there each kissed other many times, and both wept for joy. All this while the stranger

knight stood apart trying to staunch the blood from his wound, so that, though he would have got his horse and ridden away, he was not able. So then they brought him to the King and, when he was there come, as well as he might for his wound, he fell down in a swoon before them all, so that, the better to recover him, they unlaced his helm; and then all that were there saw that it was Sir Launcelot, and they were amazed beyond measure (all save the King and the Queen and Sir Bors), for they knew not that he was within the realm. Then the King bade them bring a litter and they bore him tenderly to the palace, where they put him to bed and staunched his bleeding as best they might. So, when he was a little recovered, the Queen came and knelt beside his bed and there she wept long time, as though her heart would burst.

"Weep not so, madam," said he, "for my hurt is but a small matter and will soon be healed."

"It is not for that I weep," she said, "but because of my unworthiness, and because of your great courtesy to me ward. For I entreated you right shamefully and you have requited me with wounds and travail and with the jeopardy of your life. Wherefore I weep, because that I am sore ashamed.

"Madam," said he, "there is no cause for weeping, for that which I have done, I have done right joyfully, and so ever will. For, wit ye well, lady Gueneviere, that, so long as strength be mine, I will serve you in any cause that may be yours to the uttermost, even though it be to my death."

And, at that, the Queen wept more than she did before, but no word could she find wherewith to speak.

CHAPTER VII

How the Lily Maid of Astolat greatly Loved Sir Launcelot

THUS it was that, for pure joy that Queen Gueneviere had come scathless out of that great peril, King Arthur let cry through all the land a great tourney to be held at Camelot at the feast of Assumption next ; and so, within a week of that day, did the King and all the Court ride forth from Westminster for Camelot. But, inasmuch as it was a great journey, and not to be compassed within the space of one day, they all sought lodging at the town of Astolat, which lieth midway between London and Camelot, and thither had harbingers been sent on before for to purvey harbourage. Now, as the book saith, when the King and all those knights rode forth, Sir Launcelot would not ride with them, for he made excuse that his wound was not yet whole, but, in truth, it was not for this cause that he held back, but because he was aweary of jousts and tourneys, and had great will to see the younger knights win worship and honour where he had won it in days of old. So he went not with the others ; and so, when the Queen heard that he was not riding with the others, she must needs stay behind at Westminster too, at which, when he heard of it, Sir Launcelot had some misease, for he feared greatly that she would speak to him of love.

Therefore he took counsel with himself how he might best deal, and, in the end, it seemed best that he should ride after those who had set forth for Camelot, for so would the discourtesy to the Queen seem the less ; so, early on the morning following, with no word to any, he called privily for his horse, and rode away by the same road that the others had followed. And so, in the late evening, came he to Astolat. Now here, as it so chanced, it had pleased the King and those with him to rest two nights, so that there was no lodging for any other in the town. When Sir Launcelot had sure knowledge of this, he enquired of a yeoman that stood by where he might by good fortune find lodging for the night, and the yeoman told him that, in the town, as he heard, there was no harbourage for any ; but that, without the town but at no great distance

therefrom, there stood the castle of an old knight named Sir Bernard, once of high estate but now brought very low by the malice of others ; and there it might so be that he would find lodging for the night. So Sir Launcelot thanked him and rode to the castle of Sir Bernard, and there the old knight, when he learned of his needs, made him right welcome and said :

" Sir, ye do me great honour, but, alas ! now have I fallen upon evil times, for enemies have reft me of my sustenance, so that such cheer as I would make you I can not. Howbeit, sir, we will make you such welcome as we may, and, where it falleth short of your usage, for that I pray you pardon us."

So those two, Sir Bernard and Sir Launcelot, passed through the gateway and into the castle ; and there Sir Launcelot unarmed and washed him, and, when he had so done, they set before him such meat and drink as they were able to purvey ; and so those two knights sat down and refreshed them. Thus, as they sat, there waited on them a young maid, who was the daughter of Sir Bernard, and, when Sir Launcelot was aware of how she so waited on them, he was ashamed that she should so do as though she had been a serving wench ; so therewith he turned to Sir Bernard and prayed him that his daughter might sit with them as became her station.

" Let be," said he, " for, wit you well, fair sir, that we have but one servant, and he deaf and dumb, and to such labour my daughter is well used, being in good sooth pushed thereto of necessity."

So Sir Launcelot said no more, and, presently, when they had eaten and drunk, the damsel came and sat with them. Now this maid was named Elaine la Blanche and, by some, the Lily Maid of Astolet, because that she was white and fair as any lily ; and, when she saw Sir Launcelot sitting there with her father, it seemed to her that never, in all the years that had been hers, had she looked upon so goodly a man, or one so noble and worthy of love ; and yet, as the book truly saith, Sir Launcelot at that time was full forty years of age, nor was he of those whose years sit lightly upon them, for his face was graven deep with sorrow. So she looked at him, and cast all her love unto him, in wonder and great joy ; and, suddenly, said she, as a child may speak :

" Sir Knight, may we not learn your name ?"

" Fair mistress," said he, " of that I pray you hold me

excused ; for, as at this present time, I may not tell my name to any."

Then she asked him if he were riding to the jousts at Camelot with the others.

"Nay," said he, "for in jousts and tilting I have but scant joy."

At that she was silent for a while, and then she said very eagerly :

"Oh, Sir Knight ! will you not to the jousts for my sake, and there wear my token and win the prize for me ?"

"Lily maid," he said, "that is more than ever I did for any damsel or gentlewoman that lives."

"By so much the greater my honour," she said.

Then, as she spoke, suddenly, as such things take shape in the mind, no man knows how, it came to Sir Launcelot that he would indeed ride to the jousts at Camelot, and there make trial of his strength, whether in truth he still had his might of old.

"For Sir Mador," thought he, "was but an ill-breathed knight, and therefore I overcame him, but, with the younger knights of the Round Table, it may well be otherwise. But," thought he, "I will go disguised, and so, if I fail, my shame will be the less."

Then, as he so thought, it seemed to him that in no wise could he disguise himself so well as by the wearing of this damsel's token ; for so, as all men well knew, had he never yet done for any lady that breathed. Therefore, with such thoughts chasing hotly through his mind, he turned to her and said :

"Lily Maid, for the great courtesy that you and Sir Bernard, your father, have done me, and for the great love I bear unto your name, I will even do as you would have me do and wear your token at the jousts."

At this she clapped her hands and laughed in great glee.

"Oh ! gramercy of your goodness, Sir Knight," she cried, "for now will there be no prouder lady in all this land than I. But tell me, of your courtesy, fair sir, for what cause is it that you so love the name I bear."

"There is none other name that ever was fashioned, or that ever my ears heard tell of, that is so dear to me," he said.

Right so she ran off to her chests and, presently, she returned bearing in her hand a red sleeve sewn with pearls

and this she gave to Sir Launcelot, and he took it from her hand right courteously and tenderly, and once again made he promise that he would wear it at the jousts.

With that she left him, but, all through the night, she remembered, half waking and half sleeping, how that he had said that her name was dearer to him than any other.

So, on the day next following, the King and all the Court rode for Camelot, but with them rode not Sir Launcelot, for he purposed to ride privily and alone because that he would be disguised; but, on the day next after, he would have departed and gone forth on his ways, for he was loth to be a further charge upon Sir Bernard's bounty. Howbeit Sir Bernard would not suffer him to depart as at that time, for he would have had him stay till such time as his son, Sir Lavaine, came to them. "For then," said he, "can he, with profit to you both, take your horse and you his; for, wit you well, Sir Knight, that by your white horse will all men know you."

"Ye say sooth," said Sir Launcelot, "and therefore will I gladly stay, for the day of the feast of Assumption is not yet."

So he abode there two more days, and then, on the third day, there rode in Sir Lavaine; and, when he had unarmed him, Sir Bernard called him before them all and said:

"My son, Lavaine, this noble knight, whose name we know not, is minded to ride disguised to the tourney at Camelot, against the feast of Assumption; do you therefore, the better to disguise him, take his horse and he yours, and, as for shield, is there not your brother Sir Tirre's shield hanging in his chamber? Go fetch it straightway, daughter, that this noble knight may make trial of it, whether it pleaseth him or no."

So his daughter, Elaine, went to Sir Tirre's chamber and brought thence his shield, which was of a plain white colour, and as clean and new as a lady's wimple, and this she gave to Sir Launcelot.

"I thank you," said he, "for this is a good shield and new, and right well will it serve me."

"My brother hath been sick," said she, "so that this long time it hath lain idle."

"And now, Lily Maid," said he, "I pray you that you hang in its place my own shield, till such time as I return."

With that he went and brought to her his own shield, which was dinted and seamed with many an hard stroke.

"Mercy!" cried she, when she saw it, "what sad buffets, my lord, men must have dealt you!"

"In good sooth," said he, "this shield hath ever been my truest friend."

"And I will guard it," said she, "as though it were your truest friend, till such time as you return." And this she said with gladness in her heart, for now she knew that he must needs return, so he would have his shield.

So, on the day following, about the hour of undorne, Sir Launcelot and Sir Lavaine rode forth for Camelot, each upon the other's horse, and each bearing a white shield upon his shoulder, while Sir Bernard and the Lily Maid stood beside the gateway and watched them go. So they rode till evening and, when they were come to Camelot, they found there lodging with a burgess within the town, and there they abode until our Lady's Day Assumption. Then, on that day, they got them to the lists upon the meadows, and there they hoveled upon the outskirts of the throng, watching the knights come and go, but none of them that were there paid them any heed. Now it was cried, that day, before all the people, that twelve of the Round Table knights would hold the lists against any twelve that were not of the fellowship; and that, to him who bore himself best in the affray, would be adjudged the prize. So, presently, came the King and took his seat, and then those twelve Round Table knights ranged themselves below him, and their names were Sir Persant, Sir Ironside, Sir Meliot, Sir Brennor, Sir Gareth, Sir Gileas, Sir Palomides, Sir Bors, Sir Blamor, Sir Bleboris, Sir Pelleas, and Sir Safere. So, when the crier had sent forth their challenge, there rode in twelve other knights, and, when they had saluted the King and each other, the trumpet blew and they clashed together.

Now it so was that those twelve Round Table knights were one and all passing good knights of their hands, and very soon it was manifest to all those that were there gathered together that those others were like to be put very greatly to the worse, for many of them were unhorsed, and yet, as quickly as they might get their horses again, they were once more put from their saddles.

It so fortun'd, then, that, of those knights that came from afar, there was a big and fleshy knight named Sir Hew de North Galis, who, when he was unhorsed, had much sorrow

to get his horse again by reason of his fatness. So, seeing him in evil case, Sir Launcelot came to him and said :

" Sir, pursue no more your fleeing horse but let be, for you have done that which you may, and now I pray you stand aside and let me deal in your stead."

So, when he heard this, Sir Hew was well content therewith, and made off right wearily to his tent ; and, so soon as he was departed, Sir Launcelot laid his spear in rest and thrulled into the midst of the press. The first knight that he encountered was Sir Palomides, and him he bore backwards from his horse ; then, with one spear, he smote down Sir Meliot, Sir Brennor, Sir Persant, and Sir Ironside. Then his spear broke and he got him another, and therewith smote down Sir Gareth, Sir Bors, Sir Blamor, and Sir Bleboris. At this those other knights that had been worsted took heart again and pressed forward full hotly, so that the Round Table knights were sore put to it to keep the lists. Then said Sir Bors to his kinsmen :

" This knight with the red sleeve upon his helm will surely put us all to the rebuke, for alone we can scarce endure him. Let us therefore all bear down upon him together, else shall the Round Table fellowship be greatly shamed."

So Sir Bors, Sir Lionel, Sir Blamor, and Sir Bleboris all bore down on Sir Launcelot at once and their spears struck him from both sides, and, by unhappy chance, Sir Bor's spear broke upon him and the truncheon entered deep into his side and there remained. Howbeit he smote Sir Bors clean from his saddle, and then turned him out of the press and sought Sir Lavaine.

" Take me hence," he said, " for methinketh I am stricken unto death."

Now, there was a hermit, who lived near by, of whom Sir Lavaine wotted, that had great skill in the healing of hurts and wounds ; and his name was Sir Baldwin. Thither, then, to this good hermit's dwelling, he now led Sir Launcelot, and, when he was there come, the hermit drew out the truncheon of the spear, at which Sir Launcelot gave a great and dolorous cry, and the blood gushed out of the wound so that he fell down in a swoon. Then they undressed him and put him to bed and the hermit staunched his bleeding as best he might, and so, within a while, he came to himself again and the hermit asked of him his name.

" My fair lord," said Sir Launcelot, " I am a stranger and

a knight adventurous, that laboureth through many realms."

"Alas!" said the hermit, "mine own lord, why hide ye your name from me? Forsooth I ought to know you of right, for ye are the most noblest knight of the world; for well I know you for Sir Launcelot."

"Sir," said he, "sith ye know me, help me all you may, for God's sake; for I would be out of this pain at once, either to death or to life."

"Have ye no doubt," said the hermit, "ye shall live and fare right well."

Now leave we Sir Launcelot at the hermitage and turn we to the jousts at Camelot; for, when these were ended, all men, with one voice, adjudged the prize to the knight who bore the red sleeve upon his helm; but, when they made search for him, to bring him to the King, he was not to be found; and some said that he had been wounded and borne away, no man knew whither.

"Alas!" said King Arthur, "it were great pity that so noble a knight were hurt, for never yet saw I any man bear himself better."

Then, when they were all in doubt, not knowing how they might best deal, there came one to the King who said:

"My lord, this knight came hither with Sir Lavaine, that is son to Sir Bernard of Astolat, and, should you send one to enquire of Sir Bernard, it might well be that you would gain some tidings."

"That is well said," replied King Arthur; and so he turned to Sir Gawaine, who was with him at that time, and besought him that he would ride to Astolat, and there make enquiry of Sir Bernard.

"And take with you the prize," said he, "and deliver it so you may find him, for right nobly hath that knight earned it."

So Sir Gawaine rode off, bearing with him the prize, which was a coronal of gold set with stones of virtue and worth a thousand besaunts, and, within a while, he came to the Castle of Astolat and rode up to the gateway.

"Fair sir," said Sir Bernard, "ye be truly welcome, for I am very sure from your bearing that ye be one of the noble knights of the Round Table fellowship."

"Truly," said he, "I am Sir Gawaine, that is nephew unto the King."

Then, when he heard this, was Sir Bernard very glad, and

made him all the cheer that he might, and, within a while, when Sir Gawaine had refreshed him with food and wine, then came Sir Bernard and his daughter and sat with him.

"Sir," said she, "I pray you tell us of the jousts at Camelot, how they sped and who bore away the prize."

"As for that," said Sir Gawaine, "there was no knight that bore away the prize, but the knight who bore himself most worshipfully, and who was adjudged the prize, was an unknown knight, who bore upon his helm a red sleeve sewn with pearls."

"Now blessed be God!" said she, "that that knight sped so well; for he is the man in the world that I first loved, and truly he shall be the last that ever I shall love."

"Know ye then his name?" said Sir Gawaine.

"Nay, truly," she said, "I know not his name nor from whence he cometh, but, to say that I love him, I promise you and God that I love him."

"And left he nothing here with you by the which ye may know him?" he said.

"Truly, sir, he left his shield," said she, "for that which he bore at the jousts was the shield of my brother, Sir Tirre."

At that he prayed her that she would bring to him the shield which had been left with her, and, when he saw the dented shield with its three azure lions crowned with gold, Sir Gawaine laughed to himself long and softly.

"Why laugh ye?" said she.

"Fair maid," he said, "I will tell you anon why I laugh; but first, I pray you, tell me whether the knight, whose shield this is, be your love."

"Yes, truly," she said, "my love he is. God would I were his love."

"Now," said he, "will I tell you why I laughed. Two and twenty years have I known this knight and never yet, or this day, hath he worn lady's token at joust or tourney. And, but for that, we would all have known him right well, for no other is there that ever I yet saw who could do as that knight did at Camelot at Assumption time; but, seeing that he wore a lady's token, we put from us the thought that it was he, and supposed that it was some strange knight of whom no man had yet heard."

"Who, then, is this knight?" she asked.

"Fair maid," said he, "the knight whom you love is none

other than Sir Launcelot du Lac, the knight of most renown in all the world."

"That marvelleth me but little," she said, "for very sure was I from the first that there lived no nobler knight than he."

"And now," said he, "I fear me that he is sore stricken."

At that she leapt from her seat, and waxed therewith as wan as a sheet that floats in the moonshine.

"Is he indeed wounded?" she said. "Then must I to him."

"Alas!" said Sir Gawaine, "we know not where he is become; but, that he rode from the field with your brother, Sir Lavaine, of that we have certain knowledge."

"Then will I find him," said she, "and I require you, fair father, that you give me leave to ride forth this very day, and to seek this noble knight, or else I wot well that I shall go out of my mind, for I will never stint till that I find him."

"In this do as ye list," said her father; "but I would that there rode with you some good knight for to guard you well, for the roads are full perilous for lone damsels."

"Have no fear," said she, "for either I must find Sir Launcelot or I must die."

"Alas!" said Sir Gawaine, "that I may not ride with you, as I well would, but the King requires me to fail him not at Westminster, for thither goes he and the whole Court."

"Sir," said she, "I thank you. But trust thou well that for myself I have no fear."

So then Sir Gawaine brought to her the golden coronal, which Sir Launcelot had won, and gave it into her hand, and she looked upon it as a sinner looks upon the Cross, and then laid it in her chamber beside Sir Launcelot's shield.

So, on the morn, Sir Gawaine departed for London, and the Lily Maid took her horse and rode toward Camelot, not heeding whither or by what path her horse bore her; and, when she came near to that place, by great good fortune, she fell in with her brother, Sir Lavaine, and, so soon as she was come near him, she called out to him:

"How doth my lord, Sir Launcelot?"

Then he said:

"Who told you that my lord's name was Sir Launcelot?"

So she told him how that Sir Gawaine had come to Astolat and, by Sir Launcelot's shield, had discovered who it was that had won the prize at the jousts. Then, together, they rode on till they came to the hermitage, and there the Lily Maid

lighted down from her horse, and they brought her in to where Sir Launcelot lay ; and, when she saw him lying there in his bed so wan and pale as he was, she might not speak any word but fell to weeping softly. Whereupon Sir Launcelot said :

“ Fair maid, why fare ye thus ? Ye put me to great pain ; therefore make ye no more such cheer, I pray you, for, an ye be come to comfort me, ye be right welcome, and of this little hurt that I have, I shall be right hastily whole, by the grace of God. But I marvel greatly who told you of my name.”

So she told him how that had come about, and so it was that, from that day on, the Lily Maid never went from Sir Launcelot's side, but she watched him day and night and did such attendance to him as was never seen of any before that time. Then, after a little, Sir Launcelot prayed Sir Lavaine that he would bring Sir Bors to him. So he rode to London, and presently he came back with Sir Bors in his company : and, when his kinsman saw Sir Launcelot lie in his bed thus pale and discoloured, anon Sir Bors lost his countenance, and, for kindness and pity, he might not speak but wept tenderly a great while. Then, at last, when he might speak, he said :

“ My lord, Sir Launcelot, wit ye well that I am right heavy for this sad mischance, whereof I am the causer ; for in truth I wrought most shamefully, in that, with three others at once, I set upon you to overcharge you, and, out of that, hath come this great mischief to you, mine own cousin, and the noblest knight that breathes.”

“ Fair cousin,” said Sir Launcelot, “ wit ye well that ye say overmuch for to please me, and that pleaseth me not ; for the truth is that I was minded to have overcome you all, and thus, in my pride, I was well-nigh slain, and that was in mine own default ; for I might have given you warning of my being there, and then would I have had no hurt. Therefore, fair cousin, let us leave of this matter and speak of some rejoicing, for that which is done may not be undone.”

Then Sir Bors told him how that the Queen was passing wrath with him, because that he had worn the red sleeve upon his helm at the great jousts.

“ Then is she wrath without cause,” said he, “ for I deserve no wrath ; for all that I did was because that I would not be known.”

“ Right so excused I you,” said Sir Bors ; “ but all was in vain, for she said more largely to me than I to you now. But

tell me, fair cousin, is this she, that is so busy about you, that men call the Lily Maid of Astolat."

"She it is," said Sir Launcelot, "that I can by no means put from me."

"Why should ye put her from you?" said Sir Bors, "for she is a passing fair damsel and well beseen and well taught; and would to God, fair cousin, that you could love her; but, as to that, I may not counsel you; but full well I see, by her diligence about you, that she loveth you entirely."

"That me repenteth," said Sir Launcelot.

"Sir," said Sir Bors, "she is not the first that hath lost her pain upon you, and that is the more pity."

And so they talked together of many things.

CHAPTER VIII

How the Lily Maid of Astolat Died of her Love

FOR a month after this Sir Launcelot abode with the hermit, and ever, through all that time, the Lily Maid tended him diligently by day and night, so that he grew continually stronger. Then, when he was so far recovered that he could walk and move about, Sir Bors told him of a great tourney that the King had made cry for Allhallowsmass Day, at Westminster. Now, so soon as he heard of this tourney, Sir Launcelot had great will for to come thereto and break a spear or two, if so he might ; for, as it seemed, from the day of the Camelot tourney onwards, all his eagerness of old had come back to him ; and so, upon a day, when all those others had gone forth into the woods to seek for herbs, Sir Launcelot bethought him privily to essay his strength upon his horse. So, as quickly as he might, with none helping him, he did on his armour and got upon his horse ; and then he must needs put his spear in rest and run a tilt at a small laurel bush that grew beside the path. But, as the book saith, the horse that he rode was passing lusty and fresh, because that he had not laboured for a full month ; and so, when he felt the spurs, he leapt mightily in the air, and therewith Sir Launcelot's wound burst out anew, so that, with the pain and loss of blood, he fell heavily to the ground and there lay in a swoon. Then, within a while, there came back all those others, and, when the Lily Maid saw Sir Launcelot lying there upon the ground as though he were dead, she sobbed and wept without measure, and then she kissed him very tenderly and did what she might to recover him.

So, when she saw that she might not do this, she turned fiercely to her brother and Sir Bors, and called them by all manner of names because that they had let Sir Launcelot know of the Allhallowsmass tourney which was toward. And, before her wrath, they were dumb. So then they bore him within the hermitage, and staunched his bleeding as best they might, and, in the end, he opened his eyes.

"Ah! Sir Launcelot!" said the hermit, "why put you thus your life in jeopardy?"

"Sir," said he, "I weened that I had been stronger, and so, when Sir Bors told me of the Allhallowsmass tourney, I thought to essay my strength, whether I might be there or no."

"Ah! Sir Launcelot," said the hermit, "your heart and your courage will never be done until your last day, but this should ye never have done by my goodwill. And now must ye abide by my counsel, which is this, that Sir Bors and Sir Lavaine ride away to Westminster to the tourney, and, when that be done and they return hither, I will ensure them that ye shall be as whole as they are, so ye will be governed by me."

So thus was it done, and Sir Bors and Sir Lavaine rode away to Westminster, and told the King and Queen how it fared with Sir Launcelot.

"Fie on him! recreant knight," said the Queen, "for wit ye well that I am right sorry that he shall have his life."

For, because that the Lily Maid was with him, her wrath against Sir Launcelot had no bounds.

"His life shall he have maugre you," said Sir Bors, "and any that would otherwise, except you, madam, we that be of his blood would help to shorten their lives; and, wit ye well, madam, that though you have oftentimes been displeased with Sir Launcelot, yet, in the end, have ye ever found him to be a true knight."

And therewith he departed from her.

Then, after that, was held the tourney at Westminster, on Allhallowsmass Day, at which Sir Gareth forjousted all that were there and won the prize, of which, when Sir Launcelot heard, he was greatly rejoiced. As for him, he grew daily stronger, till, in the end, the day came when he was so far recovered that he bade farewell to the hermit with all manner of heartlie thanks; and he and the Lily Maid rode back to Astolat, where they had great cheer of Sir Bernard, for, wit ye well, he was right glad of their coming.

Then, on the day next following, Sir Launcelot would ride away for the King's Court at Westminster, and so he bade farewell to Sir Bernard and his daughter. But she followed him to the gateway, and there, when she felt that she must either speak or lose him for ever, she said:

"Sir Launcelot, fair knight and courteous knight, now that

I see ye will depart, have mercy upon me and suffer me not to die for thy love."

"What would ye that I did?" said Sir Launcelot.

"I would have you to my husband," said she.

"Fair damsel," said he, "I thank you, but truly I cast me never more to be a wedded man."

"Then let me be your love," said she.

"Jesu forfend!" said Sir Launcelot, "for thus should I requite your father and your brother full ill for their great goodness."

"Alas!" said she, "then must I die for your love."

"Ye shall not so," said he, "for wit you well, Lily Maid, that you will, some day, bestow your heart upon some good and noble knight that will wed you, and then will I give to you two together wide lands in my own country, for to enjoy so long as ye live. This much will I do for you, fair damsel, for your great kindness to me ward, and ever, while I live, will I be your own knight."

"Of all this," said she, "will I have none; for, but if ye will wed me, or be my lover, wit ye well, Sir Launcelot, that my good days are done."

"Fair maid," said he, "of these two things ye must pardon me."

So he made to depart, and she fell down upon her face among the stones and there lay till some came forth from the castle and carried her to her chamber. Then Sir Bernard and Sir Lavaine ran forth out of the gateway and called after Sir Launcelot. So, when they were come up with him, Sir Bernard said:

"Sir, I cannot see but that my daughter, Elaine, will die for your sake."

"That me sore repenteth," said Sir Launcelot, "for she is a full fair maiden, good and gentle and well-taught; but, wit ye well, Sir Bernard, that, of that, I was never the willing causer."

"Sir," said Sir Lavaine to his father, "my sister in this doth no more than do I; for, ever since that I first saw my lord, Sir Launcelot, I could never depart from him but with great pain."

"Well," said Sir Bernard, "I blame not Sir Launcelot, but would to God that there were some remedy to hand."

So Sir Launcelot rode away full of heaviness, and all that might be done to comfort the Lily Maid did Sir Bernard and

his son ; but nothing did it all avail, for she neither ate nor slept. So she endured for ten days, and ever she made moan for Sir Launcelot, so that, in the end, her ghostly father bade her leave such thoughts.

"Why should I leave such thoughts?" she said. "Am I not an earthly woman? And, as it seemeth to me, all the while the breath is in my body I may complain me, for my belief is I do none offence, even though I love an earthly man; and I take God to my record that I never loved none other but Sir Launcelot du Lac, nor never shall. And a pure maiden I am for him and for all others."

Thereupon she called her father and her brother, Sir Tirre, and prayed her father that her brother might write a letter like as she might endite it.

So her father granted her that, and the letter was written word by word as she had devised. When this was done, she said:

"When I am dead, let this letter be placed in my right hand, and my hand bound fast, with the letter in it, while I be yet hot, so that, when I am cold, it will be fast therein; and let me be put on a fair bed with all the richest clothes that I have about me, and with the coronal of gold that Sir Launcelot won for me and gave unto me upon my head. And then let my bed be brought to the nearest place where Thames is, and there placed upon a barge well covered over with black samite. Thus father, I beseech you, let it be done."

So her father granted it her faithfully, that all things should be done like as she had devised, and, when he had done this, she died.

Then they put her richest clothes upon her, and the coronal of gold about her head, and took her in her bed to Thames, and there laid her on a barge; and with her on the barge went an old man who served them, who was both deaf and dumb.

Now the King and Queen were at this time at Westminster, and, by fortune, they were speaking together at a window; and so, as they looked unto Thames, they espied a black barge coming down upon the flood, and had great marvel what it might mean. So the King called Sir Kay and showed it to him.

"Go hither," said he, "and take with you Sir Branadil and Sir Agravaine, and bring me ready word what is there."

Then these three knights departed and came to the barge, and there they found a passing fair lady lying dead upon a bed, and an old man who would speak no word. So they returned unto the King and told him what they had found, whereupon he took the Queen by the hand, and, together, they went down to where the barge lay, made fast with a rope to the steps of the palace.

Then the King and Queen entered upon the barge, and, with wonder and pity in their hearts, they looked upon the fair lady that lay therein ; and then the Queen espied a letter in her right hand. So they took the letter and returned to the palace, and there the King called many knights and ladies about him, and, when they were all assembled, he made a clerk to read the letter. And this was what was there written :

“ Most noble knight, Sir Launcelot, now hath death made us two at debate for your love. I was your lover, that men call the Fair Maid of Astolat ; therefore, unto all ladies, I make my moan. Yet pray for my soul and bury me, at the least, and offer ye my mass-penny. This is my last request ; and a clean maiden I died, I take God to witness. Pray for my soul, Sir Launcelot, as thou art peerless.”

Then, when the letter had been read, they were all moved with pity and the King made send for Sir Launcelot.

When he was come, the King made the letter to be read to him, and he stood and heard it word by word.

“ My lord, King Arthur,” said he, “ wit ye well that I am right heavy for the death of this damsel, but God knoweth I was never causer of her death by my willing, but she loved me out of all measure.”

“ Ye might have shown her,” said the Queen, “ some bounty and gentleness that might have preserved her life.”

“ Madam,” said he, “ she would none other way be answered but that she must be my wife or else my love, and of these two I might not grant her.”

“ Well,” said the King, “ pity it is to be sure ; but now, nothing remaineth but that we should bury her : therefore, Sir Launcelot, do you oversee that she be worshipfully interred within the Abbey.”

So this was done and she was richly interred within the Abbey ; and some there were that would have taken the coronal from her head, for it was worth a thousand besaunts, and they said it were great pity this should be buried with

her ; but Sir Launcelot would not suffer any to touch it, for he had won it for her and given it unto her.

“ And so,” said he, “ shall she have it to the end.”

So then he offered her mass-penny, and all the knights of the Round Table that were there at that time offered with Sir Launcelot.

CHAPTER IX

How Sir Agravaine Entrapped the Queen and Sir Launcelot at Carlisle

SO it passed on to Christmas, and ever the Court stayed at Westminster, and through Christmas till after Easter, and then, in the month of May, they all rode northward together to the city of Carlisle; and, within twenty-two days of their setting forth, they came to that place, and there the King and Queen lodged in the castle.

Now Sir Agravaine and Sir Mordred had, for long time past, been very greatly troubled at the amity and goodwill that ever was between the King and Sir Launcelot, for all that they could do to the contrary. And now, thought they, must we, at this present time, devise that which we would have, or be for ever put to the disadvantage; for the occasion thereto, as it seemed to them, might not come again within a while, by reason that Sir Launcelot was so often away from the Court. So these two came to their three brothers and said:

"It behoveth us now to make plain to King Arthur, our uncle, how that Sir Launcelot shameth him with the Queen; therefore let us take counsel how we may best do this, or else shall we never have King Arthur from the government of this realm; for only through enmity between him and Sir Launcelot can this be brought to pass."

At these words Sir Gawaine rose up very angrily and said:

"My brother Agravaine, I pray you and charge you that you move no such matter, for, wit ye well, I will not be of your counsel."

And so too said Sir Gaheris and Sir Gareth.

"Then will I," said Sir Mordred.

"I believe well that," said Sir Gawaine, "for ever, brother Mordred, is your mind bent on craft and malice."

Thus arose between them hot debate, and, while the noise was at its full, King Arthur came to where they were and enquired of them the cause why they thus disputed so hotly.

"My lord," said Sir Agravaine, "I will tell you. Here I and my brother, Sir Mordred, brake unto my brothers, Sir

Gawaine, Sir Gaheris, and Sir Gareth, how that we know all that Sir Launcelot holdeth your Queen, and so hath done long ; and we be your sister's sons and we may suffer it no longer."

"My nephew Agravaine," said the King, "full loth would I be to begin such a thing, but I might have proof upon it ; for Sir Launcelot is an hardy knight, and, as ye all know, the best knight among us all, so that, but and he be taken with the deed, he will fight with him that bringeth up the noise, and I know of no knight that is able to match him. Therefore, an it be sooth as ye say, I would that he were taken with the deed."

Then Sir Gawaine rose up and said :

"Mine uncle, Arthur, I pray you that you hearken not to slanderous tongues ; for to poison men's minds is but a simple thing, but the cleansing thereof may not be within life's compass. Therefore, sir, I may not longer stay within these walls, for very sure am I that lies will be the reward of those that stay."

With that he turned his back upon his brother, Sir Agravaine, and passed out, and in like wise did Sir Gaheris and Sir Gareth. Then, when these were gone, Sir Agravaine said to the King :

"Sir, in this wise will I counsel you. Ye shall ride to-morrow on hunting and, doubt ye not, Sir Launcelot will not go with you. Then, when it draweth toward night, ye may send the Queen word that ye will lie out all that night, and so may ye send for your cooks ; and then, upon pain of death, we shall take him with the Queen, and either we shall bring him to you dead or quick."

"Well," said the King, "I will do as you would have me, but, unless that ye take him with the deed, I shall not believe but that he is a true knight unto me."

So, on the morn, King Arthur rode on hunting, and sent word to the Queen that he would lie out all that night. Then Sir Agravaine and Sir Mordred got to them twelve knights and hid them in a chamber in the Castle of Carlisle. And these were their names : Sir Colgrevice, Sir Meldron, Sir Gringorlin, that was son to Sir Gawaine and the lady Soronen, Sir Meliot, Sir Petipace, Sir Galleron, Sir Astamore, Sir Gromore, Sir Curselaine, Sir Lovel, Sir Florence, and Sir Malion.

When these twelve knights were well hidden, Sir Agravaine

made send a messenger to Sir Launcelot, praying him to see the Queen, touching some weighty matter as to which she would be advised of him.

"Ye shall not go by my counsel," said Sir Bors, "for I dread me sore of treason; for Sir Agravaine ever watcheth you daily to do you shame."

"Have ye no dread," said Sir Launcelot, "for I shall go and come again, and make no tarrying."

"Well, God speed you," said Sir Bors, "and send you sound and safe again."

So Sir Launcelot departed and took his sword under his arm, and so passed to the Queen's chamber. Then, so soon as he was come therein, those twelve knights came to the door and cried out:

"Traitor knight, Sir Launcelot, now art thou taken."

And this they cried with a loud voice, so that all the Court should hear.

"Alas!" said Queen Gueneviere, "now are we mischiefed both."

"Madam," said Sir Launcelot, "is there here any armour within your chamber? for, if there be, give it me and I shall soon stint their malice."

"Alas!" said the Queen, "that I have none."

All this while those Round Table knights, that were without, made clamour without cease and cried continually:

"Traitor knight, come out of the Queen's chamber, for, wit thou well, thou art so beset that thou shalt not escape."

Then, after a little, when they might not by any other means break in, they got a great form out of the hall, and therewith they rushed at the door.

"Fair lords," said Sir Launcelot, "leave your noise and your rushing and I shall set open the door, and then may ye do with me as it liketh you."

"Come off then," said they, "and do it; for it availeth thee not to strive against us all, for wit ye well that we be well armed at all points."

Then Sir Launcelot wrapped his cloak around his left arm, and unbarred the door a little, so that one man might pass in. Whereupon Sir Colgrevice, a big knight of the country of Gore, pushed hastily in. This seeing, Sir Launcelot threw all his weight upon the door and, with the Queen and her ladies helping him, barred it once again. Thereat was Sir Colgrevice very wrath and aimed a great stroke at Sir Launcelot's

head, but he put it aside with his sword and then smote Sir Colgrevice such a buffet that he fell grovelling upon the floor dead. Then, as quickly as they might, the Queen and her ladies put Sir Colgrevice's armour upon Sir Launcelot, and, when this was done, he cried out through the door :

"Leave your noise, Sir Agravaine, for wit we well that ye shall not prison me this night ; and, therefore, an ye do by my counsel, go ye all from this chamber door and make not such crying as ye do, for I promise you by my knighthood that, so ye will depart and make no more noise, I shall as to-morn appear before you all before the King ; and then let it be seen which of you all will accuse me of treason ; and there I shall answer you, as a knight should, that hither I came to the Queen for no manner of malengine, and that will I prove and make it good upon you with my hands."

"Fie on thee, traitor !" said Sir Agravaine, "for we will have thee, maugre thy head, and slay thee in this chamber if we list : for we let thee wit that we have the choice of King Arthur to save thee or to slay thee."

"Ah ! sir," said Sir Launcelot, "is there none other grace with you ? Then keep yourself."

Therewith he made the Queen and her ladies to set open the door suddenly, and himself rushed out among them and, with his first stroke, he slew Sir Agravaine, who was foremost among those who clamoured at the door. Then, with two more strokes, he slew Sir Lovel and Sir Florence, that were sons to Sir Gawaine and the lady Ettarre ; and, when they saw this, the others turned and fled, but not so fast but that Sir Mordred had got a sore wound in the shoulder as he ran. So, when they were thus departed down the stairway, with much noise, Sir Launcelot returned unto the Queen and said :

"Madam, now wit you well that all is at an end, for now will King Arthur ever be my foe, and this most noble and gracious fellowship of the Round Table will be broken unto the ends of the earth."

Then, when the Queen fell to weeping, he said :

"Howbeit, madam, wit ye well that I will stand firm and staunch beside you in any peril that may beset you ; for less than that I may not do with honour."

"Not so," said she, "for, when the King cometh back from hunting, then will they take us both together, and of rescuer I shall have none. Get you therefore away, so that by no manner of means they may take you, and then, so they

will put me to the death, you may deal in manner as you deem best."

"Fear not," said he, "that I shall fail you."

So therewith he left her and went to his lodging, and there he found Sir Bors, and told him all that had befallen.

"Ah! fair cousin," said he, "now is war come to us all."

"Sir," said Sir Bors, "all is welcome that God sendeth us; and we have had much weal with you and much worship, and therefore we will take the woe with you, as we have taken the weal. And now in this wise would I counsel you, that, inasmuch as the lady Gueneviere is in distress for your sake, that ye rescue her knightly; for, an you did otherwise, all men would speak shame of you unto the world's end, seeing that you were taken with her, whether in the right or wrong. Therefore, fair cousin, see that she be not put to a mischievous death or the shame shall be yours."

"Jesu defend me from shame," said Sir Launcelot, "and God knows I were loth that the Queen should die a shameful death; but, wit you well, fair cousin, that, an it so be that I rescue her, then must I do much harm to those that compass her about, and, peradventure, destroy some that are my best friends, the which would do me much pain; and, if so be that I rescue her, where then shall I bestow her?"

"That shall be the least care of all," said Sir Bors, "for did you not keep the lady Elaine for five years in the Castle of Joyous Garde, and did not Sir Tristram there, in that same castle, keep the lady Isolde for many years? And that same place is your own, and in likewise may ye now do, and there keep the Queen till the heat of the King be past. And then shall ye, perchance, bring the Queen to the King again with great worship, and have great thanks from all that you did rescue her."

"In that matter," said he, "I may have good warning by Sir Tristram. For when, by means of treaties, Sir Tristram brought La Bella Isolde again to King Mark, look how shamefully that false traitor slew Sir Tristram, as he sat harping before them both."

"All this is truth," said Sir Bors, "but there is one thing shall courage you and us all. Ye know well that King Arthur and King Mark were never of like conditions, for there was never yet man that could prove King Arthur untrue of his promise."

So they debated to and fro for near an hour, and then, in

the end, it was agreed between them that Sir Launcelot should ride away into the woods and that there Sir Bors should, anon, join him with such knights as were favourable to him. And the knights that went with him were these, Sir Lionel, Sir Blamor, Sir Bleboris, Sir Menaduke, Sir Villiers, Sir Hebes (that had been esquire to Sir Tristram), Sir Lavaine, Sir Urre, Sir Nerovens, Sir Gileas, Sir Selisen, Sir Bellangere, Sir Palomides, Sir Safere, Sir Clogis, Sir Dinas, and Sir Clarius.

CHAPTER X

How, when the Queen would have been Burned at the Stake, Sir Launcelot Rescued Her.

NOW turn we again unto Sir Mordred, who, when he was escaped from Sir Launcelot with much pain and a sore wound on his shoulder, got his horse and rode with all the speed he might to King Arthur, where he lay out in the woods, and there he told him all that had befallen.

"Mercy! how may this be?" said the King. "Took ye him in the Queen's chamber?"

"Yes, truly," said Sir Mordred, "there found we him unarmed, and there he slew Sir Colgrevice and armed him in his armour."

"Alas!" said the King, "now am I sure that the Round Table fellowship is broken for ever, for with him will many a noble knight hold. And now it hath so fallen that I may not with worship deal in any wise but that my Queen must suffer the death."

So, as soon as he was returned to Carlisle, the King commanded the Queen to the fire. Then, when he heard of this, Sir Gawaine had great sorrow for the shameful death that the Queen must die, and so he ran to his uncle and said:

"My lord, King Arthur, I would counsel you not to be over-hasty, but that ye should put this judgment of the Queen in respite for many causes. First and foremost is that, though it were so that Sir Launcelot was found in the Queen's chamber, yet it might well be that he came thither for none evil. For oftentimes we do many things that we ween to be for the best and yet, peradventure, it turneth to the worst. For I dare say that my lady, your Queen, is both good to you and true, and that all this noise cometh of malice."

"Say what ye will," said the King, "but she shall have the law; and, as for Sir Launcelot, if I might get him, wit you well that he should have a shameful death."

"Jesu defend!" said Sir Gawaine, "that I may never see it."

"Why say ye so?" said King Arthur, "for soothly ye have

no cause to love Sir Launcelot ; for, this night last past, he slew your brother, Sir Agravaine, and your sons, Sir Florence and Sir Lovel."

"My lord," said Sir Gawaine, "of all this I have knowledge, of whose death I repent me sore ; but, inasmuch as I gave them warning, and told my sons and my brethren aforehand what would befall in the end, I will not meddle me thereof, nor revenge me nothing of their deaths, for they were themselves the causers thereof."

"Well," said the King, "that is as you would have it. And now, my nephew, I pray you make ready in your best armour, with your brothers, Sir Gaheris and Sir Gareth, to bring my Queen to the fire, there to have her judgment."

"Nay, my noble lord," said he, "that will I never do ; for, wit ye well, I will never be in that place where so noble a Queen as my lady Gueneviere shall take a shameful death."

"Then," said the King, "will ye suffer your brethren, Sir Gaheris and Sir Gareth, to be there ?"

"My lord," said he, "wit you well that they will be full loth to be there present ; but they be young and full unable to say thee nay."

So, with that, Sir Gawaine turned and went out from the King's presence, whereupon the King sent for Sir Gaheris and Sir Gareth, and, when they were come to him, he commanded them as he had commanded Sir Gawaine.

"Sir," said Sir Gaheris, "ye may well command us to be there, but, wit you well, it shall be sore against our will. But, so we be there by your straight commandment, ye must hold us excused that we wear any harness of war, for and if we come in peaceable wise, so shall we do less dishonour to the Queen."

"Do as ye will," said the King, "only make you ready, for she shall soon have her judgment."

So they made them ready to go out with the Queen, but Sir Gawaine went not, but shut himself up within his chamber.

"Alas !" said he, "that ever I should endure to see this woeful day !"

Then was the Queen led forth without Carlisle, and there was she despoiled unto her smock, and shriven of her misdeeds by her ghostly father. Then was there weeping and wailing and wringing of hands of many lords and ladies.

So, as she was thus brought to her death, one came and told Sir Launcelot that the Queen was nigh her end. Upon

this he and his fellows came out of the wood, where they lay near by, and burst upon those that were there assembled as fast as they might spur their horses, smiting down all that withstood them, till Sir Launcelot came to where the Queen stood, and then he caught her up before him on his horse and so rode off again whence he had come. In that woeful fray, which was the first where ever Round Table knights did battle one with other, there were slain Sir Segwarides, Sir Griflet, Sir Tor, Sir Belias, Sir Branadil, Sir Aglovale, Sir Gauter, Sir Damas, Sir Priamus, Sir Kay the stranger, Sir Lambegas, Sir Herminde, and Sir Perimones. And also there, by sad mischance, Sir Launcelot slew Sir Gaheris and Sir Gareth, for they were both unarmed and unaware, but in very truth he saw them not, but struck blindly at all who stood between him and the Queen.

So, anon, men came and told the King of the death of those knights, and of how Sir Launcelot had borne off the Queen upon his saddle-bow.

"Alas! and alas!" said he, "for now have I lost the fairest fellowship of knights that ever Christian king held together; and the death of some of them will cause the greatest mortal war that ever was. Ah! why did Sir Launcelot slay Sir Gaheris and Sir Gareth, and they all unarmed?"

"My lord," said one that was there, "they were slain in the hurtling, for, as Sir Launcelot thrang in the thick of the press, he smote to right and left, not knowing whom he smote, and so, unhappily, they were slain."

"Alas!" said the King, "for I dare say that Sir Gareth loved Sir Launcelot above all men earthly, and Sir Launcelot him; and, as for Sir Gawaine, very sure am I that, when he heareth of Sir Gareth's death, he will well-nigh go out of his mind. Ah! Agravaine, Agravaine, Jesu forgive it thy soul for the evil that thou haddest unto Sir Launcelot, for therefrom cometh all this sorrow."

Then there came one to Sir Gawaine where he sat miserably within his chamber, and told him how that Sir Launcelot had borne off the Queen and that, in the fray, many knights had been slain.

"Of that I misdreaded," said he, "for full well wist I that either he would rescue her or else he would die in the field; and, to say the truth, he had not been a man of worship had he not rescued the Queen, insomuch as she should have been burned for his sake; and, in that, he hath done but knightly.

and as I would have done myself, an I had stood in like case. But where are my brothers, Sir Gaheris and Sir Gareth, that they come not to me ? ”

“ My lord,” said the man, “ Sir Gaheris and Sir Gareth be slain.”

“ Jesu defend ! ” said he. “ For all the world I would not that they were slain, and, in especial, my brother Sir Gareth.”

“ Sir,” said the man, “ he is slain and that is great pity.”

“ Who slew him ? ” he asked.

“ Sir,” said the man, “ Sir Launcelot slew them both.”

“ That may I not believe,” said Sir Gawaine, “ that he slew my brother Gareth, for I dare say that Gareth loved him more than me and all my brothers and the King’s self. And full well wot I that Sir Launcelot loved him but a little behind Sir Galahad.”

“ Sir,” said the man, “ it is noised that he slew him.”

“ Alas ! ” said Sir Gawaine, “ now is my joy done.”

And, with that, he went to the King as one who wots not what he does and cried out :

“ Oh ! King Arthur, mine uncle, my good brother Sir Gareth is slain.”

And then he fell upon the ground at his feet and wept. Then, when he was a little recovered, he said :

“ Sir, I will go see my brother, Sir Gareth.”

“ Ye may not see him,” said the King, “ for I caused him to be interred and Sir Gaheris both ; for I well understood that the sight of Sir Gareth would have caused you double sorrow.”

“ Alas ! my good lord,” said Sir Gawaine, “ how slew he my brother Gareth ? Mine own good lord, I pray you tell me.”

“ Truly,” said the King, “ I will tell you as it was told to me. As it is said, Sir Launcelot slew them both in the thickest of the press and knew them not ; and therefore let us shape a remedy for to revenge their deaths.”

“ My lord and my king,” said Sir Gawaine, “ wit you well that I will now make you a promise by my knighthood and by the faith I owe to God that, from this day on, I shall never fail Sir Launcelot until the one of us shall have slain the other ; and therefore I require you, my lord, dress you to the war, for I promise unto God that, for the death of my brother, Sir Gareth, I shall seek Sir Launcelot throughout seven kings’ realms that I shall slay him or else he shall slay me.”

"Ye shall not need to seek him so far," said the King, "for, as I hear say, he will abide us at Joyous Garde."

"Then," said Sir Gawaine, "let us essay our strength to draw him out thence."

So the King sent letters and writs throughout the length and breadth of the realm, for to assummon all his knights and, within a while, he had there gathered together, at Carlisle, a great host. But many, such as they of Cornwall and North Galis, and some of the country of Gore, made common cause with Sir Launcelot, for hatred of King Arthur and in the hope to rid him of his kingdom.

CHAPTER XI

How King Arthur and Sir Gawaine laid Siege to Joyous Garde

SO, about midsummer's day, the King and Sir Gawaine and all those knights that were with them, set forth from Carlisle and, within ten days, they came to Joyous Garde and there laid siege to the place ; and there, without the walls, they lay for fifteen weeks. And so it befell that, within a week of their coming, Sir Launcelot sat, upon a day, on the stone causeway that was named the Path of Glory under which ran the clear stream from the spring that rose within the castle ; and then, as he there sat, he thought upon the lady Elaine and her son Galahad and of how those two, in the days long past, had named that stone causeway the Path of Glory because of the manner in which the evening sun was wont to paint it as with gold ; and then was his soul filled with heaviness for the glad days that had been and would be no more. So he went forth and said to them all :

" No more shall this castle be named Joyous Garde but henceforth shall it ever be named Dolorous Garde, for the sorrow which is within its walls and without."

Then it befell, upon a day in harvest-time, that Sir Launcelot looked over the walls and spake on high to King Arthur and to Sir Gawaine :

" My lords both," said he, " wit you well that all is in vain that ye make at this siege ; for here win ye no worship but maugre and dishonour, for, an it list me to come myself out and my good knights with me, I should full soon make an end of this war."

" Come forth then," said King Arthur, " an thou darest, and I promise thee I shall meet thee in the midst of the field."

" God defend me ! " said Sir Launcelot, " that ever I should encounter with the most noble King who made me knight."

" Fie upon thy fair language," said the King, " for, wit you well and trust it, I am thy mortal foe, and so ever will be to my death-day, for thou hast slain my good knights, and full noble men of my blood, that I shall never recover again."

Also thou hast dishonoured my Queen and taken her from me by force."

"My most noble lord and king," said Sir Launcelot, "ye may say what ye will, for ye wot well that with yourself I will not strive; and that I have slain your good knights, I wot well that I have done so, and that me sore repenteth; but I was enforced to do battle with them for the saving of my life. And, as for my lady Queen Gueneviere, except your own person and that of my lord, Sir Gawaine, there is no knight under heaven that dare make it good upon me that ever I was traitor unto your person, or that the lady Gueneviere is not as true unto your person as any lady that breathes. Howbeit, it hath liked her good grace to have me in charity, and to cherish me more than any other knight, and, therefrom, have evil tongues, of their malice, made sorrow between us. And meseemeth, my good lord, that I had lost a part of my worship in my knighthood if I had suffered my lady, your Queen, to have been burned. Therefore, my good and gracious lord, I pray you take her again unto your good grace, for wit ye well that she is both fair and true and good."

"Fie upon thee, false recreant knight," said Sir Gawaine. "I let thee wit mine uncle, King Arthur, shall have his Queen and thee, maugre thy visage, and slay you both, an it so liketh him."

"It may well be," said Sir Launcelot; "but, wit ye well, my lord, Sir Gawaine, that an me list to come out of this castle, and my good knights with me, you should win the Queen and me harder than ever ye won any strong battle."

"Fie on thy proud words! thou false recreant knight," said Sir Gawaine. "What cause hadst thou to slay my brother, Sir Gareth, that loved thee more than all his kin?"

"Sir," said Sir Launcelot, "before God I would, with as good will, have slain my own son as Sir Gareth; for he was fair and gentle and courteous, and withal as good a knight of his hands as any that liveth; but by pure misadventure I slew him, not knowing whom I smote."

"Thou liest, recreant knight," said Sir Gawaine; "thou slewest him in despite of me; and therefore, wit thou well, I shall make war to thee all the while that I may live."

"Alas!" said Sir Launcelot, "for were you not so mischievously set, I would not doubt to have the good grace of my lord, King Arthur."

"I believe it well," said he, "for thou hast many long

days overled us all and destroyed many of our good knights."

"Sir," said Sir Launcelot, "never may it be said of me that I slew no good knights as, my lord, Sir Gawaine, ye have done. And so did I never but in my defence, that I was driven thereto in the saving of my life."

"Ah!" said Sir Gawaine, "thou speakest now of Sir Lamorak, and, wit thou well, I slew him, and of that I make me no shame."

"Ye slew him not of yourself," said Sir Launcelot, "for it had been overmuch on hand for you to have slain him; for, by my faith, he was one of the best knights christened of his age."

With that Sir Launcelot turned him from the wall, for he was aweary of Sir Gawaine's malice; and the book saith that King Arthur, hearing all that was said, would gladly have accorded with Sir Launcelot and taken again his Queen; but by no manner of means would Sir Gawaine suffer it, but, contrariwise, he gathered together all the knights that he could and brought them beneath the walls, and there he made them all to call out continually and with one voice:

"False recreant knight, Sir Launcelot; false recreant knight Sir Launcelot."

Now, when the knights that were within the castle heard this great clamour, and the words that these knights continually cried out, they went unto Sir Launcelot and said:

"Sir, wit you well that we are greatly shamed at the rebukes which those without the wall put upon you continually; wherefore we pray and charge you, as you would keep our service, that you lead us forth into the field against them. For, wit you well, sir, that you fare as a man that is adread, and, for all your fair speech, it will not avail you. Therefore lead us forth or else discharge us of our service."

"Alas!" said Sir Launcelot, "for truly I am full loth to ride forth out of this castle and do battle."

So then, Sir Launcelot, seeing that he must either go forth to battle or else be reft of those that followed him, sent a messenger to King Arthur to let him know how it stood with him, and praying him that he and Sir Gawaine would keep them from the field. But, to this, neither the one nor the other would assent for, inasmuch as it was their quarrel, it might not so be. So both parties made them ready for battle,

and Sir Gawaine, in his wrath, purveyed many of his knights to wait upon Sir Launcelot for to slay him.

On the morn, therefore, at undorne, King Arthur was ready in the field with three great hosts, one before each gate of the castle ; and then Sir Launcelot's fellowship came out in good array from all three gates at once, that is to say, Sir Bors from the south gate, Sir Launcelot from the west gate, and Sir Lionel from the north gate ; and, as the book saith, scarce were they come forth into the field before Sir Gawaine rode fiercely at Sir Lionel and thrust him through the body, so that he fell from his horse, and with great pain they got him alive into the castle. Then there followed a great battle, and, in the midst of the battle, Sir Bors smote King Arthur from his horse and then, leaping down, drew his sword and said to Sir Launcelot :

" Shall I make an end of his war ? "

" Be not so hardy," said Sir Launcelot, " upon pain of thy head that thou touch him not."

And therewith he lighted down from his own horse and put King Arthur thereon.

" My lord, King Arthur," said he, " for God's sake stint this strife, for ye would get no worship here an I were to do my utterance ; but now always I forbear you, for which I shall have scant praise of those that follow me."

Now, when King Arthur heard these words, and saw Sir Launcelot standing on his feet in the midst of the battle, he burst into weeping, thinking on the great courtesy that was in Sir Launcelot, more than in any other man that lived.

" Alas ! " said he, " that ever this war began."

So the two hosts fought till sundown, and then they both withdrew for to rest them ; and, on the morn, at undorne, they were again ready. Then once more they clashed together and the party of Sir Launcelot was put to the worse, so that King Arthur and Sir Gawaine pressed them within the gates. Thereupon the knights that were with Sir Launcelot were sore displeased, and they came to him and said :

" Sir, we see that you ever forbear and keep you out of the press, and this doth us much harm ; for we do that we may for your sake and yet you help us not, so that we be overborne."

" Alas ! " said Sir Launcelot, " I have no heart to fight against my lord, King Arthur, for ever meseemeth that therein I do not as I ought to do."

"My lord," said Sir Palomides, "though you spare them all, they will never give you thank, and if they may get you at avail, ye are but dead."

So then Sir Launcelot understood that they spoke but truth, and he braced him to the fight and rode forth so fiercely that King Arthur's host was scattered here and there about the field, and many were slain and Sir Gawaine was sore wounded by Sir Bors.

Thereupon King Arthur, seeing how his host was scattered, and having no great heart to continue that war, withdrew the remnant of his knights to Carlisle; for, now that Sir Gawaine was wounded, there was none to spur him on to mischief Sir Launcelot further; and, of his own will, he was full loth to continue the war.

Now, at the time that Queen Gueneviere was judged before the King to be burned at Carlisle, it chanced that the Bishop of Rochester set sail upon an holy pilgrimage to Rome; and, when he came thither, he told the Pope how that King Arthur and Sir Launcelot were at war because of Queen Gueneviere.

"Alas!" said the Pope. "By God's grace this must be abated."

So, by the hand of the Bishop of Rochester, he sent bulls to King Arthur requiring him, under pain of the interdiction of all Britain, that he forthwith accorded with Sir Launcelot and took back again his Queen unto him. And of Sir Launcelot he required, by the same hand, that he restored the Queen forthwith unto King Arthur. So, about the time of harvest, when he was once more returned to the land of Britain, the Bishop of Rochester came to the King at Carlisle, and showed him those bulls; and then was the King right glad of the Pope's commandment, but, for all that he might urge upon him, never would Sir Gawaine consent that the King should accord with Sir Launcelot. Howbeit King Arthur gave unto the Bishop his great seal and his assurance, as he was a true anointed King, that the Queen should receive forgiveness and peace, and that Sir Launcelot should come and go again safe. And so, with these in his hand, the Bishop came to Joyous Garde and told Sir Launcelot of the great perils that he ran, if he withheld the Queen any longer from King Arthur.

"It was never in my thought," said Sir Launcelot, "to withhold the Queen from my lord, Arthur, but, insomuch as she should have been burned for my sake, meseemeth it was my part to save her from that danger. till better recovery

might come. And now I thank God that the Pope hath made her peace, for God knoweth I will be a thousand times more gladder to bring her again than ever I was of her taking away. But, should any danger await her, then will I keep her from an harder shower than ever I yet kept her from."

"It shall not need you," said the Bishop, "for, wit you well, the Pope must be obeyed."

"Well then, my lord Bishop," said Sir Launcelot, "I pray that you will ride unto the King at Carlisle and let him have knowledge that, within ten days from now, by the grace of God, I myself shall bring my lady, Queen Gueneviere, unto him."

So the Bishop departed and came to the King at Carlisle, and told him all how Sir Launcelot had answered him, at which King Arthur was glad beyond measure. And then, so soon as he might, Sir Launcelot made him ready for the journey, and, when the day came, he set forth with the Queen from Joyous Garde; and with him went Sir Bors, Sir Blamor, and Sir Bleboris, for Sir Lionel was not yet recovered of his wound that Sir Gawaine gave him. So, within a while, they came to Carlisle, and then Sir Launcelot and the Queen clothed them all in white cloth of gold tissue, and so they rode up to the castle, that all might behold them; and then Sir Launcelot himself alighted and avoided his horse, and he took the Queen and lifted her down, and then brought her to where the King sat in the Great Hall, with Sir Gawaine at his right hand; and there were also assembled many other great lords and ladies, to the number of two hundred.

Then, while they all held silence, Sir Launcelot and the Queen kneeled down before them all in the midst of the hall.

"My most redoubted King," said he, "you shall understand how that, by the Pope's commandment and yours, I have brought to you the Queen, as right requireth. And if there be any knight, of whatsoever degree he be (except your own person), that will dare to say but that she is good and true to you, I here myself, Sir Launcelot du Lac, will make it good upon his body that she is a true lady; but liars ye have listened to, my lord King, and that hath caused sorrow and debate betwixt us two. For they that told you those evil tales were liars, and so it fell upon them; for, had not the might of God been with me that night, I might never have endured twelve knights and they all armed for to destroy me.

But evil was in their hearts and in their mouths, for, wit you well, my lord, King Arthur, I was sent for unto the Queen by messengers, I wot not for what cause, but I was not so soon within the chamber door but, anon, Sir Agravaire and Sir Mordred called me traitor and recreant knight."

"They called thee right," said Sir Gawaine.

"My lord, Sir Gawaine," said he, "in their quarrel they proved themselves not in the right."

"Ye may say what you will and the King may do in this matter what he will," said Sir Gawaine, "but, wit ye well, Sir Launcelot, that thou and I shall never be accorded while we live, for ye have slain three of my brethren, and two of them ye slew traitorously, inasmuch as they had no harness on them."

"That sore repenteth me, as ye wot well," said Sir Launcelot, "for I take God to witness that I slew neither of those two noble knights by intent; for, as for Sir Gareth, I loved him more than all my own kin, and liefer would I have cut off mine own hand than have slain him wittingly."

"Thy fair language," said Sir Gawaine, "falleth on deaf ears, for what avail are fair words, seeing that thou art false both to the King and me?"

"Sir," said Sir Launcelot, "he beareth not the life that may make that good, and, if that you, Sir Gawaine, will charge me with so high a thing as this, you must pardon me, for then needs must I answer you."

"Nay," said Sir Gawaine, "we are past that at this time, for the Pope hath charged mine uncle that he take his Queen again and, further, that he accord with thee, Sir Launcelot, as for this season; and, therefore, thou shalt go safe as thou camest. But, wit ye well that, for all this, in this land thou shalt not abide past fifteen days, for in this were the King and I accorded ere thou camest hither. Therefore take thou this now as thy judgment."

Now, when Sir Launcelot heard these words, his heart was filled with so great sorrow that for a long while he might not speak; for all that he held dear in memory and love was within the bounds of this realm of Britain. Then, when he might find his voice again, he said before them all:

"Alas! most Christian realm, that I have loved above all other realms, now must we two part in this most mournful wise. For in thee, my lord, King Arthur, and in thy noble fellowship of the Table Round have I found more joy than in

all the riches that the world could give me. And now of this fair fellowship is there an end, and I must hie me to a distant land and there end my days. And, if your wrath be so unabated that you come thither to war upon me, then, Sir Gawaine, I pray you charge me not with treason nor felony, for, an ye do, then I must needs answer you."

"Do thou thy best," said Sir Gawaine, "for, when thou art gone, we will soon follow after and break thy strongest castle upon thy head. And now make thou no more language, but deliver the Queen and pike thee lightly out of this Court."

"Well," said Sir Launcelot, "an I had wist of this manner of greeting, I would have advised me twice or that I had come hither. For, an the Queen had been as dear to me as ye noise her, I durst have kept her as long as I would from the best fellowship of knights under heaven. Howbeit, seeing that I am come hither under the Pope's commandment, there is no remedy but that I must do as I am charged."

Therewith he raised the Queen to her feet and, standing before them all, took her by the hand and said :

"Madam, now must I depart from you and this noble fellowship of the Round Table for ever, and, sithen it is so, I beseech you to pray for me and say me well ; and, if ye be hard bested by any false tongues, lightly, my lady, let send me word and, if any knight's hands may deliver you by battle, I shall deliver you."

Then, turning him about to all those lords and knights there assembled, he said :

"Now let see who he be in this place that dare say the Queen is not true unto my lord, King Arthur. Let see who will speak, an he dare speak."

And therewith Sir Launcelot brought the Queen to the King and bowed low before him ; and, when he had delivered her, he turned him about and, looking neither to the right hand nor to the left, passed silently out of their midst. And, when he was gone, there was neither baron nor knight, lady nor gentlewoman of any that sat around that hall, but they all wept at his parting as though they were out of their minds ; except only Sir Gawaine, and he wept not but, contrariwise, looked straight before him full fiercely.

Then Sir Launcelot took his horse and, with his kinsmen, passed out of Carlisle, and so, within a while, he came to Joyous Garde ; and, when he was there come, he called together all his fellowship and asked them what they would

do. At this they answered all wholly together, with one voice, that they would do as he did.

"My fair fellows," said he, "for this your goodwill I thank you with all my heart, for now must I depart for ever out of this most noble realm, and in such wise as doth me great pain. For a banished man departeth never out of no realm with worship, and therein lies my heaviness; for ever I fear that, after my days, they shall chronicle upon me that I was banished out of this land for treason, whereby my good name shall be for ever defamed."

Then up spake Sir Palomides and Sir Safere, his brother, and Sir Bellangere and Sir Urre and Sir Gileas and Sir Lavaine and many others.

"Sir," said they, "an ye be so dispond as to abide in this country, we will never fail you; and, if ye list not to abide in this land, then will we all follow you whithersoever ye may go."

"My fair lords," said he, "I well understand you, and, as I may, I thank you; and, seeing that you are so disposed to me ward, I dare say that, on my lands, I may maintain you as well as ever were maintained any knights."

Then said they all at once:

"He shall have shame indeed that would leave you now, for well we understand that by the nobility of the Round Table fellowship hath King Arthur long been upborne. And, because of this nobility, hath this realm long been in quiet and rest; and, of that nobility, the greater part was thine, Sir Launcelot."

"Sirs," said he, "I will not hide from you that of your fellowship I shall be greatly joyed. But, for the land that we may leave behind us, I have in good sooth some dread, by reason of Sir Mordred, for he is passing envious and applieth him continually to trouble."

So all those knights were accorded with Sir Launcelot and, within the fifteen days appointed, they all sailed with him from Cardiff for the city of Bayonne. But, before they sailed, Sir Lavaine was wed to the lady Fellalie, that was daughter to Sir Urre.

CHAPTER XII

How Sir Gawaine Fought Sir Launcelot Outside the City of Bayonne

NOW the grief of King Arthur at the parting of Sir Launcelot, and so many noble knights of his fellowship, is not to be told in words, for, in truth, he loved Sir Launcelot more than all else on earth, and gladly would he have accorded with him, but for Sir Gawaine; but ever that knight called upon him, for the sake of his honour, to follow after Sir Launcelot and overthrow him in his own land, or else for ever stand shamed before the world. So, in the end, King Arthur was consenting thereto, and he got together a great host and so set sail from Cardiff. But, before he sailed, he called unto his nephew, Sir Mordred, and said:

"My nephew, thou hast not in all things dealt with me as one who loves me, but, inasmuch as you and Sir Gawaine alone remain of all your kin, and, seeing that nothing will content him but that he must sail with me and do battle with Sir Launcelot in his own country, here have I sent for thee, therefore, for to put the rule of this country within thy hands until that I return."

"My lord," said he, "this task that you lay upon me will I faithfully perform, as God is my judge."

So therewith was the King perforce content, and he sailed away and came within fifteen days to the country of Guienne; and there he laid the land waste with fire and sword, of which, when Sir Bors heard, he came to Sir Launcelot and said:

"My lord, Sir Launcelot, it is shame that we thus suffer King Arthur's host to bring destruction to our lands and to our people; therefore I pray you that you lead us forth to meet them in the field, for to do otherwise is shame."

"What say ye, my lords?" he asked of those other knights that were with him.

"Fair brother," said Sir Lionel, "I will give you this counsel, that we keep our strong walled towns until such time as, from their own destruction, King Arthur and his knights have hunger and cold, and blow upon their nails; and

then let us freshly set upon them and shred them down as sheep in a field, so that aliens may take example for ever, how they come upon our lands. And this that I counsel you will be no hard matter, for the lands be full bare to sustain any host a while, by reason of the mighty wars that, whilom, King Claudas made upon this country."

"Brother," said Sir Launcelot, "I will do even as you counsel me; but first will I send an embassage unto King Arthur, praying him, for the love he once bore me, that he take his ships once more and depart out of this land."

So he sent a damsel on a white palfrey, and, when King Arthur heard the message that she bore, he had great goodwill toward Sir Launcelot, and would readily have accorded with him, and have got him away in his ships back to Britain, but Sir Gawaine would not suffer him. So the damsel came back to Sir Launcelot weeping.

When she was thus returned, he took counsel once more with his knights, whether they should match their enemies in the field or abide their coming in the city of Bayonne; and so, in the end, they got them within the city walls, with all manner of victual and all the strength that they could gather together; and there they awaited King Arthur's coming. Then Sir Gawaine continually urged King Arthur that he should straightway lay siege to that city, and, in the end, he agreed thereto. Thus, within a while, they came there with all their host and lay without the walls, and so the siege ran on many weeks with no great advantage to either. Then, upon a day, Sir Gawaine came before the walls, armed at all pieces, and when he was there come, he cried out in a loud voice:

"Where art thou now, thou false traitor, Sir Launcelot? Why hidest thou thyself within holes and walls like a coward? Look out now, thou false traitor knight, and here I shall revenge upon thy body the death of my three brethren."

These words spake Sir Gawaine daily by the space of fifteen days, so that all heard the language that he spoke, and yet of answer made Sir Launcelot none.

Then all his knights drew about him and said:

"Sir, now must ye defend ye like a knight, or else ye be shamed for ever; for now ye be named a traitor, it is time for you to stir, for ye have slept over long and suffered over much."

"So God me help," said Sir Launcelot, "I am right heavy of Sir Gawaine's words, for now he chargeth me with treason. Therefore, I wot it as well as ye, I must defend me or else be called recreant."

So Sir Launcelot armed him and came upon the walls and cried out to King Arthur :

"My liege lord, this long time have I forborne me, for loth indeed am I to do battle with any of your blood, seeing that you are the King who made me knight ; but now may I endure no longer, but must defend me, inasmuch as Sir Gawaine hath appealed me of treason."

"Leave thy babbling," cried Sir Gawaine, "and come out, an thou darest, and let us ease our hearts."

So Sir Launcelot rode forth out of the chief gate, and both the hosts stood by for to see him and Sir Gawaine encounter. Then those two knights drew apart a great way, and then they turned their horses and came together with all their might, and, with such strength did they encounter, that both their horses were overturned. Then they avoided their horses and drew their swords and so lashed at one another, and, for a while, Sir Launcelot, from mislike of that which he did, put not forth his full strength, but, in the end, Sir Gawaine gave him a sore wound upon the thigh, whereupon Sir Launcelot waxed hot with anger and pain and so dealt Sir Gawaine such a buffet on the helm, that he fell to the earth. Then Sir Launcelot would have withdrawn him, but Sir Gawaine cried out :

"Why withdrawest thou thee, thou false traitor knight ? Now turn again and slay me, for, an thou leave me thus, when I am whole, then trust thou well that I shall do battle with thee again."

"I shall endure you, sir, by God's grace," said Sir Launcelot, "but, wit thou well, Sir Gawaine, I will never of intent smite a fallen knight."

So Sir Launcelot went into the city and Sir Gawaine was borne into one of King Arthur's pavilions, and leeches were brought to him and salved his wound with soft ointments.

There, for three full weeks, he lay with all manner of leechcraft that might be had ; and, as soon as he might go and ride, he straightway armed him at all points, and got upon his courser and so came riding before the chief gate of Bayonne, and there he cried on high :

"Where art thou, false traitor knight, Sir Launcelot? Come forth, thou recreant knight, that I may prove thy treason on thy body."

When Sir Launcelot heard this language he said :

"Sir Gawaine, me repenteth sorely of your foul sayings: for, wit you well, Sir Gawaine, I know your might and all that ye may do against me, and well ye wot that ye may not greatly hurt me."

"Come down, thou traitor knight," said he, "and make it good the contrary with thy hands if so thou canst; for it mishapped me in the last battle to be in some part hurt of thy hands, which should not have been; therefore wit thou well that I am come this day to make amends, for I ween this day to lay thee so low as thou didst me."

"Defend me," said Sir Launcelot, "that ever I be so far in your danger as ye have been in mine, for then were my days done."

"Come forth, thou traitor knight and recreant," said Sir Gawaine, "and cease thy talking."

"Now shall I not tarry long," said Sir Launcelot, "seeing that ye call me of treason. And, wit ye well, Sir Gawaine, that when I come forth, ye shall have both your hands full of me."

Then Sir Launcelot armed him and rode out of the chief gate before the hosts, for they were charged to hold them still and forbear from strife, while that battle endured. And, when he and Sir Gawaine had each saluted other, then they laid their spears in rest and came together as it had been thunder, and Sir Gawaine's horse was overthrown and fell upon its side. Thereupon he lightly avoided his horse and drew his sword and cried out :

"Now light thee down, thou traitor knight; for, though this mare's son hath failed me, yet upon my feet will I, by God's grace, soon put thee to the worse."

Then Sir Launcelot avoided his horse and dressed his shield afore him, and those two dealt each other such sad buffets and so fast and strong, that all in those two hosts marvelled. Full well and valiantly for a space did Sir Gawaine defend him, but, as the book saith, his years at that time were twoscore and eight, and, within a while, his breath began to come thickly. Then, by mischance rather than of intent, Sir Launcelot smote him on the helm where his old wound was, so that he fell down on the earth in a swoon. So he lay

for a while senseless, but, anon, he opened his eyes and, seeing Sir Launcelot standing by, he cried out :

" Traitor knight, wit thou well that I am not yet slain : therefore come thou near me and perform this battle to the uttermost."

" I will no more do than I have done," said Sir Launcelot, " for to smite a wounded man that may not stand, God defend me from such shame."

Wherewith he turned him and made his way into the city and, ever as he went, Sir Gawaine called after him :

" Traitor knight, wit thou well that, when I am whole, I will do battle with thee again, for never shall I leave thee till that one of us be slain." But stand upon his feet he could not, so they bore him to his pavilion, and there he lay till more than a month was passed.

CHAPTER XIII

How, at the Battle of Dover, Sir Gawaine was Slain in a Boat

NOW, when Sir Gawaine was well-nigh mended of his hurt, he bethought him that he would once again do battle with Sir Launcelot ; but, on the very same day that he essayed his strength, whether he could abide in the saddle or no, there came sudden tidings from Britain that Sir Mordred had let cry, throughout the realm, word that King Arthur had been slain in Guienne, and that thus, by King Arthur's own decree, he was now King over all that realm. So, when King Arthur heard these tidings, he left the siege of Sir Launcelot and got together his ships and, with all the speed that might be, he and those knights that were with him set sail for Britain.

In this wise following, came the word of Sir Mordred's rebellion unto King Arthur. When Sir Mordred let it be noised abroad that King Arthur was slain, he would have taken the lady Gueneviere to be his Queen, thinking thereby to strengthen his government. But she, learning of his intent, fled from him and shut herself up, with such knights as remained faithful to her, in the Castle of Pallandour, which is in Logris, and from thence she sent to King Arthur a swift messenger in a small ship that sailed betimes from Exmouth. Then, within a while, came word to Britain, by that same ship, that Arthur was not slain, but that, with all his host, he would, as soon as he might purvey ships, set sail for his own kingdom. When he had sure word of this, Sir Mordred called to him all those knights and lords of the realm that made common cause with him and said to them :

"Choose ye now betwixt mine uncle and me, whether ye will be held down and hedged about with foolish laws and burdens, as ye were beneath his rule, or whether ye shall do, each as it seemeth good in his own eyes, as it was before the coming of Arthur."

Then many of them and, in especial, those of Essex and Kent, and of the country of Mercia, made short declaration for Sir Mordred, for they loved but little the customs of King

Arthur ; and, as for the rules of chivalry that he laid upon them, they held them in continual abhorrence. And the country of Gore, in like wise, made common cause with Sir Mordred, because of the crafts and enmity of Queen Morgan le Fay ; and many others, of Cornwall and North Galis, made common cause with Sir Mordred, because that they would be free of the laws and customs that King Arthur had put upon them.

“ Was not this Arthur a Roman ? ” they said one to another. “ For truly his father Uther was all Roman, being, as he was, the son of Constantius. Therefore let us be once more as we were before the coming of the Romans and do as each man listeth.”

So they joined them lightly unto Sir Mordred, for he there made them a great promise that, so they paid truage to him, every man should do that which pleased him. But some few there were in Logris who held to King Arthur, because of the nobility that had been in him, and in his knights of the Table Round. And these ranged themselves around Queen Gueneviere in the Castle of Pallandour, where she lay for better safety.

Then, in the full springtime, that is to say upon the tenth day of May, the ships that bore King Arthur and his host came to Dover. Then, when they drew near to the shore, it was plain to all men how great treason was afoot, for there, by the edge of the sea, Sir Mordred had got together a great army for to withstand him. So King Arthur's army got their boats and came to the shore as best they might, and there, on the sands of the seashore, was fought a great battle with many slain on both sides. And so it was that, after they had fought together till noon, Sir Mordred withdrew his army to a hill that is named Barham Down ; and so, when he saw that he was surely gone, then King Arthur made search for the dead and wounded upon his side. So, as they searched, suddenly, upon the seashore, they came upon Sir Gawaine lying in one of the boats that were there and stricken unto death, but he was not yet dead.

So they brought word of this to King Arthur, and, when he wist that Sir Gawaine was laid so low, he ran as fast as he might to where he was and, so soon as he saw how that his nephew, who had ever been so strong and warlike, was now stricken low, his heart was torn with sorrow and he took him in his arms and said :

"Alas ! my dear nephew, now is my joy gone from me for ever, for, in thee and in Sir Launcelot, I chiefly had my joy and my affiance ; and now have I lost you both, so that all my earthly joy hath gone from me."

"Mine uncle," said Sir Gawaine, "wit you well my death-day is come, for I am smitten upon the old wound the which Sir Launcelot gave me, and of which I feel well that I must die. And all this hath come upon me of mine own hastiness and wilfulness, in that I would not suffer you to accord with Sir Launcelot, when he prayed you thereto. Therefore, mine uncle, I require you, with all speed, to let come a clerk, that I may make my peace with Sir Launcelot before I die."

So the King sent for a clerk and, when he was come, Sir Gawaine made him to write thus :

"Sir Launcelot du Lac, flower of all noble knights that ever I heard of or saw in my days, I would let thee have knowledge that now is my death come upon me ; for, so soon as this which I endite is written, I must die of a sore wound that I have gotten. Therefore, Sir Launcelot, for the great love that hath been whilom between us two, I beseech you, of your knighthood, that you return again unto this realm, and see my tomb and thereon pray some prayer for my soul. And, furthermore, Sir Launcelot, I pray you, for all the great love that ever there was betwixt us two, to make no tarrying, but come over the sea in all haste, that thou mayest, with thy knights, rescue from his great peril that noble King who made thee knight, for I wot he be sorely bested with a false traitor, which is Sir Mordred my brother. And now, Sir Launcelot, farewell, for my breath cometh hardly, and may God and thou forgive me the heat and enmity I had against thee."

Then, when this was written, Sir Gawaine was shriven and received his Saviour, and therewith he died.

So, on the day next following, they interred him in the chapel in Dover Castle, where he lieth to this day ; and there was much weeping among those that stood by, for, though upon his head there were many sins, yet was he as brave a knight as any that ever bore life, and to his King staunch and faithful unto death.

CHAPTER XIV

How King Arthur and all his Knighthood Perished at the Battle of Camlan

SO it fell about that, on the day next following, after that Sir Gawaine had been interred, King Arthur assembled the remnant of his knights, and with these rode to where Sir Mordred, and those that were with him, lay in wait for him upon Barham Down ; and there was fought another great battle, with many slain on both sides, but to neither any great advantage. So, the better to rest him and to gather fresh strength, Sir Mordred drew back to Canterbury, and there many of Essex, Southsex, and Kent gathered to his standard. Now, what with those that he had lost in the siege of Bayonne, and in the battles of Dover and Barham Down, King Arthur had but a remnant left him, so that Sir Mordred, so soon as he had gathered new strength, began to push him westward and ever farther westward, nor, at the first, could King Arthur do any great thing to the contrary ; but, so soon as he was come to his own country of Logris, many knights and lords of that country gathered to him daily, so that his strength grew continually as he went. Thus, then, in the end, he came, on the Monday after Trinity, to a place which is called Camlan, on the hills above where Severn meets the sea ; and here he faced him about, to await the coming of Sir Mordred. Then, that night, they all slept, but King Arthur slept but little, and, at one time, he dreamed that there came to him his nephew, Sir Gawaine, who said :

“ Mine uncle, King Arthur, hither am I come to warn you that, an you do battle to-morn with Sir Mordred, so shall you surely meet your death ; for wit you well that you are by much short of his strength. Therefore, mine uncle, I would counsel you in this wise : that you accord with Sir Mordred for a full month from this day, for then, when that month be run by, will Sir Launcelot have come hither with all his strength, which Sir Mordred will very hardly withstand. But, an you do battle on the morn, wit ye well, mine uncle, that your death-day is come.”

Then King Arthur awoke and called to him Sir Lucan and his brother, Sir Bedivere, for these were the oldest knights of those that were left to him, and of the most wisdom, and to them he told his dream.

"Sir," said they, "this is a message from God, which you may not lightly put aside."

"Of that," said King Arthur, "I am well persuaded."

So he sent those two knights to Sir Mordred, his nephew, and charged them that, in any wise they might, they should make a treaty for a month with Sir Mordred; and, to that end, to proffer him lands and goods without stint, as they might think best. Therewith they departed and, anon, they came to Sir Mordred and entreated him long time for to make treaty for a month from that day; and, at the last, Sir Mordred was agreed thereto, upon a covenant that Kent and Cornwall should be his forthwith, and the whole realm his after King Arthur's death; and, as a pledge thereto, it was at that time appointed that, at undorne on the day following, King Arthur and Sir Mordred should meet midway between the two hosts, each bringing with them but fourteen men, and there swear upon their knighthood to the treaty.

Now King Arthur misdoubted him sorely of Sir Mordred's fealty, and so to his host he said that, if they saw any draw his sword, then should they come on full fiercely, and slay all who stood in their way. In like manner spoke Sir Mordred to those that were with him that, so soon as they saw any sword drawn, they should come fiercely on and slay all that stood before them. Thus, at the hour of undorne, met King Arthur and Sir Mordred midway between the two hosts, each having with him but fourteen men; and there did they both swear to the treaty upon their knighthood, and wine was brought with which they drank thereto.

Then, in the very midst of the drinking, it chanced that one of those that stood by trod upon an adder, and it reared its head and bit him in the heel, whereupon he drew his sword for to slay it. Then, so soon as they saw that drawn sword, both those hosts rushed together, and there began a great slaughter such as was never seen in any Christian land. For, from undorne till nightfall, those two hosts fought together without ceasing, smiting and slaying so grimly that scarce one man in either host was left on live. Then, at the last, as the darkness fell, King Arthur became aware of Sir Mordred, who stood with his sword drawn, among a heap of slain.

"Now, tide me death or betide me life," said King Arthur, "that traitor shall not escape me, for at better avail shall I never have him."

So he took his spear in both his hands and ran toward Sir Mordred crying :

"Traitor, now is thy death-day come."

At that, Sir Mordred dressed his shield before him, but King Arthur smote him under the shield through the body to the length of a fathom. Then Sir Mordred knew that he had his death wound, and, with all the might he had, he thrust himself up to the very butt of the spear and, holding his sword in both hands, smote King Arthur on the side of the head so that he pierced the helm. So, when he had so done, Sir Mordred fell down stark dead to the earth. Then King Arthur, too, knew that he was slain, and he fell to the earth in a swoon ; and, anon, he was there found by Sir Lucan and Sir Bedivere, for they alone remained of all that host, and they were both full sore wounded.

So those two knights essayed to lift King Arthur, for to carry him to a hermitage near by, but Sir Lucan's wounds were too many and, as they bore him between them, his wounds gushed forth such blood that he fell down and died. Then said the King to Sir Bedivere :

"Now is my time come that I must die ; therefore, I charge thee, take thou my good sword, Excalibur, and go with it to yonder water-side, and, when thou comest thereto, throw the sword therein, and come again and tell me what thou seest."

So Sir Bedivere took the sword and departed, but, as he went, the light of the moon shone full openly upon the rich jewels that were about the haft and pommel and, at the sight of these, Sir Bedivere's heart failed him, and he hid the sword beneath a tree and came again to King Arthur.

"What saw ye ? " said he.

"My lord King," said Sir Bedivere, "nothing did I see but the wind and the waves."

"That is untruly said of thee," said the King, "therefore go thou yet again and fulfil my commandment."

So once again Sir Bedivere went to the water's edge, and once again his heart failed him because of the richness of the jewels. So he hid the sword among the reeds and came again unto the King.

"What sawest thou ? " said the King.

"Sir," he said, "I saw nothing but the waters wap and the waves wan."

"Ah! traitor untrue," said King Arthur, "now hast thou betrayed me twice. Who would have weened that thou, who art named a noble knight, wouldst betray me for the riches of the sword? Now, therefore, go again lightly and do my bidding, for thy long tarrying putteth me in great peril."

Therewith Sir Bedivere was sore ashamed, and he ran as swiftly as he might to where the sword lay, and then, closing his eyes so that he might not see its splendour, threw it far into the water. So he returned to the King.

"What saw ye?" said he.

"Sir," said Sir Bedivere, "I closed my eyes at the beginning lest I might fail of my purpose, but, when the sword was far thrown, I opened mine eyes once more and methought, in the moonlight, that I saw a hand which caught the sword and brandished it thrice before it sank."

Now, when he heard this, some say that King Arthur died forthwith, and that, between them, Sir Bedivere and a good hermit bore his body to Glastonbury, and there interred it. Others say that there came a barge across the waters and that on the barge were three Queens, who bore him away to the vale of Avilion, which is at Glastonbury. But, of this tale, the untruth standeth forth plainly, for, of the three Queens that, as the story saith, were on the barge, one was Queen Morgan le Fay and another the Queen of North Galis; and, as is well known to all men, King Arthur had no more deadlier foes than these two Queens; and, whether it be true or whether it be false availeth little, for very sure it is that, on the morning next following, the dead body of King Arthur was brought to Glastonbury, which is in the vale of Avilion, and there was interred; for so was his body discovered by Giraldus Cambrensis, in the reign of our most noble King, Henry II, and Queen Gueneviere lying by him.

CHAPTER XV

How Sir Launcelot Died at Glastonbury and was Buried at Joyous Garde

NOW, when Sir Gawaine's letter, that he wrote at his death time, was brought to the country of Guienne to Sir Launcelot, then was that knight wrath out of all measure with Sir Mordred.

"Alas!" said he, "that ever that false traitor escaped my hands at Carlisle, for now I feel, by the doleful letter that my lord Sir Gawaine—on whose soul Jesu have mercy!—hath sent me, that King Arthur is sore bested."

"Sir," said Sir Bors, "it were best that we set sail with no more tarrying than may be, for then may we yet rescue King Arthur from his traitor nephew."

"Fair cousin," said Sir Launcelot, "I will well that we so do, and God grant me to come within sword's length of that traitor Sir Mordred, for then shall I soon stint this strife."

So they made them ready all manner of ships and galleys, for to pass into Britain with such an host as they might assemble. And so, within a while, they came to Dover, and there Sir Launcelot made enquiry, of one who met them, how it fared with King Arthur. Then was he told of the battle at Dover and of the battle at Barham Down, and of the last great battle at Camlan, where were slain King Arthur and Sir Mordred and all the knighthood of the realm.

"Alas!" said Sir Launcelot, "for this is the heaviest tidings that ever came to man's ears. And who then, fair sir, is now King?"

"Sir," said the man, "it is rumoured that Sir Constans, the son of Cadur of Cornwall, is now named King over the whole realm, for none there was to withsay him."

Whereat Sir Launcelot sighed heavily and said:

"Alas! for the death of so noble a King and for the end of the fairest fellowship of knights under heaven. And now, I pray you, show me the tomb of Sir Gawaine."

So they brought him to the castle, and, in the chapel that was therein, they showed him Sir Gawaine's tomb, and Sir

Launcelot there kneeled down and prayed right heartily for his soul. And so he remained throughout the night, neither eating nor drinking nor sleeping, but praying on his knees for the soul of Sir Gawaine, till the morning sun came in upon him.

Then Sir Launcelot called to him Sir Hector, who was the younger of his two brothers, and him that he loved best and said :

" Fair brother, this host that we have brought hither has come all too late, for King Arthur and all his noble fellowship are slain. Now, therefore, I pray you, bide you here with the host fifteen days from now onward, for I myself would seek my lady, Queen Gueneviere ; for, as I hear say, she hath great pain and much disease, and hath fled into the west country, to a nunnery that is at Almesbury. Therefore, if I come not again within fifteen days, take you your ships and hie you back to the kingdom of Guienne, and there rule the country till I come again."

" My lord, Sir Launcelot," said Sir Bors, " what think you for to do, now to abide in this realm ? For, wit thou well, thou shalt find here few friends."

" Be that as it may," said Sir Launcelot, " I will forth on my journey, and with me shall ride neither knight nor squire."

Then they saw that it availed not to strive with him ; and so he departed and rode westerly till he came to the convent that is at Almesbury, and there he left his horse in a wood near by, and came on foot into the cloister.

So as the Queen, all in a white habit, walked with her ladies in the cloister, she suddenly became aware of Sir Launcelot, who stood before her ; and, as she beheld him, so she suddenly swooned away. Then, when her ladies had in some part recovered her, she said :

" My lord, Sir Launcelot, I had weened not to have seen you again in this life ; but, now that you have come, you may not here abide, for I labour continually for the saving of my soul, and of this I am put in some jeopardy by your coming."

" Madam," said he, " I am come here for no other cause but to do that which I may for your better comfort, seeing that all this doleful war hath come about through me."

" Sir," she said, " there is your courtesy at war with truth, for full well wot I that, but for my love, whereof I gave you scant ease, King Arthur and his noble fellowship would yet be all on live, and this war would not have been. But Sir

Agravaine and Sir Mordred rested not till they had laid for us a snare, and therewith were we entrapped ; and, though at that time we thought no wrong, yet can I not wholly excuse me, for that which they then did was framed on that which they knew aforehand. And of all this I, and I alone, am the causer ; for full well I wot, Sir Launcelot, that thou has never loved me as I thee."

"As for that, madam," said he, "I will say neither yea nor nay, for the time for that is past, and, whether I say yea or whether I say nay, there is shame in either. But, wit you well, madam, that, for the death of King Arthur, I hold myself to blame and none other, and so ever will till my death-day. So cease, madam, your weeping, for very sure am I that you will find now the grace of our Saviour."

"To that end," she said, "will I pray without cease, and for the soul of my lord, King Arthur."

So he turned and left her ; and, when he was gone, she wept for a great while, as one whose heart would burst, and then her ladies led her within, and she fell upon her bed and swooned.

So then Sir Launcelot took his horse and rode to Glastonbury and, when he was there come, he made enquiry for the tomb of King Arthur—and so they showed it to him with Sir Bedivere watching beside it day by day, whereupon he fell upon his face on the ground where the tomb was and then cried out on high :

"Oh ! my most noble lord, King Arthur, whom I loved more than all other men on earth, now have I brought thee to this sad end and, therefore, I now make avow before my Saviour that here, in Glastonbury, will I abide till the day I die, and here will I do daily penance for the sins that I have sinned against thee and, in like wise, will I continually make prayers for thy soul."

So there Sir Launcelot dwelt from that day on, fasting continuously and daily kneeling upon the tomb of King Arthur with prayers for his soul ; so that, within six months of his coming, he was so changed and shrunken with fasting that no man might know him for what he had been.

Now turn we to Sir Hector and the host that had been left at Dover. When the fifteen days were past and Sir Launcelot came not, then said Sir Hector :

"I will get me to the ships, and hie me back to my own country, as my brother charged me."

"Do as thou wilt," said Sir Bors, "but, as for me, I will ride through the land, lengthways and broadways, till I find Sir Launcelot, for of me he may have need."

So Sir Hector sailed away with the host, and Sir Bors, Sir Blamor, Sir Bleboris, and Sir Lionel rode to London for to seek tidings of Sir Launcelot; and there, in London, by great mischance, Sir Lionel was slain. Then those other three knights buried him with all honour as a Christian knight and, when they had so done, they rode away northward upon their quest, for they reasoned that at Joyous Garde would Sir Launcelot surely be found. So, thither at the last they came and, when they found that he was not there, they rode to Camelot and there they found the Great Hall of the Round Table all falling to decay, for no man there was to tend it; and, therein and round about it, were wild beasts; and owls and ravens nested where once had sat the flower of the world's chivalry, at which they were all so greatly cast down that not one of them might speak a word for sorrow.

Thus, after many months of quest, they came, in the end, to Glastonbury, for there were they told that King Arthur lay buried, and they had great will to see the place. So they enquired for his tomb, and when they were brought to it they found none there but an old man in a rough black habit.

"Good sir," said Sir Bors, "is this truly where lieth buried that most noble King Arthur?"

"Soothly," said the man, "this is the place."

So then they all knelt on the tomb and offered up their prayers, and, when they had so done, Sir Bors said:

"Sir, for many months past have we been riding long and broad seeking my cousin, Sir Launcelot du Lac. Now, therefore, an you have any tiding of that most noble knight, I pray you keep it not from us."

"What manner of man was he?" said the man.

"Sir," said Sir Bors, "I marvel greatly where you may have lived your life; for I weened that there was none living but had heard the fame of that most noble of all earthly knights, who hath never yet been matched of any mortal foe, and whom all men name the goodliest man and the most courteous that ever bore life."

"Ah, Sir Bors, my fair cousin," said the man, "what is the mightiest man that breathes but a shadow that passeth away and is gone?"

And then they knew that it was Sir Launcelot who spoke

to them, and, when they saw how he was shrunken and withered with sorrow and fasting, they all there wept for a while so that they might not speak.

"My fair kinsmen," said Sir Launcelot, "make ye, I pray you, no such dole for me, for of this world and its worship I am full weary; and wit you well that the penance whereof I am wasted in this wise is because of King Arthur, for, through me, came that most doleful war that hath destroyed him and all his fair fellowship; and, that I should yet be on live when all that noble fellowship is slain, is to me shame too great to be borne; therefore pray I daily that my days may be short, and of that indeed have I full certainty. Now, therefore, good my kinsmen, I pray this of you that you will abide here with me to the end, for well I wot that it is not far distant."

So of this they all made ready promise, and there they dwelt with him for the space of two years, and, with them, were Sir Bedivere and Sir Pelleas; for, as the book saith, the lady Nimue, his wife, had held back Sir Pelleas from the wars that had been, because of the great love she bore him, for the which those other knights held Sir Pelleas in little liking.

Then came the day when Queen Gueneviere died at Almesbury, and they brought her body to Glastonbury and there laid it by the side of King Arthur.

Then, within a little after this, Sir Launcelot fell sick and lay in his bed, and then he sent for his kinsmen and said:

"Sir Bors, Sir Blamor, and Sir Bleboris, now has the day come that I must die, and I charge you all, of your kinship and of the love that you ever bore me, that you bring my body to Joyous Garde and there lay me to rest by the side of the lady Elaine and my son, Sir Galahad, as I vowed aforetime."

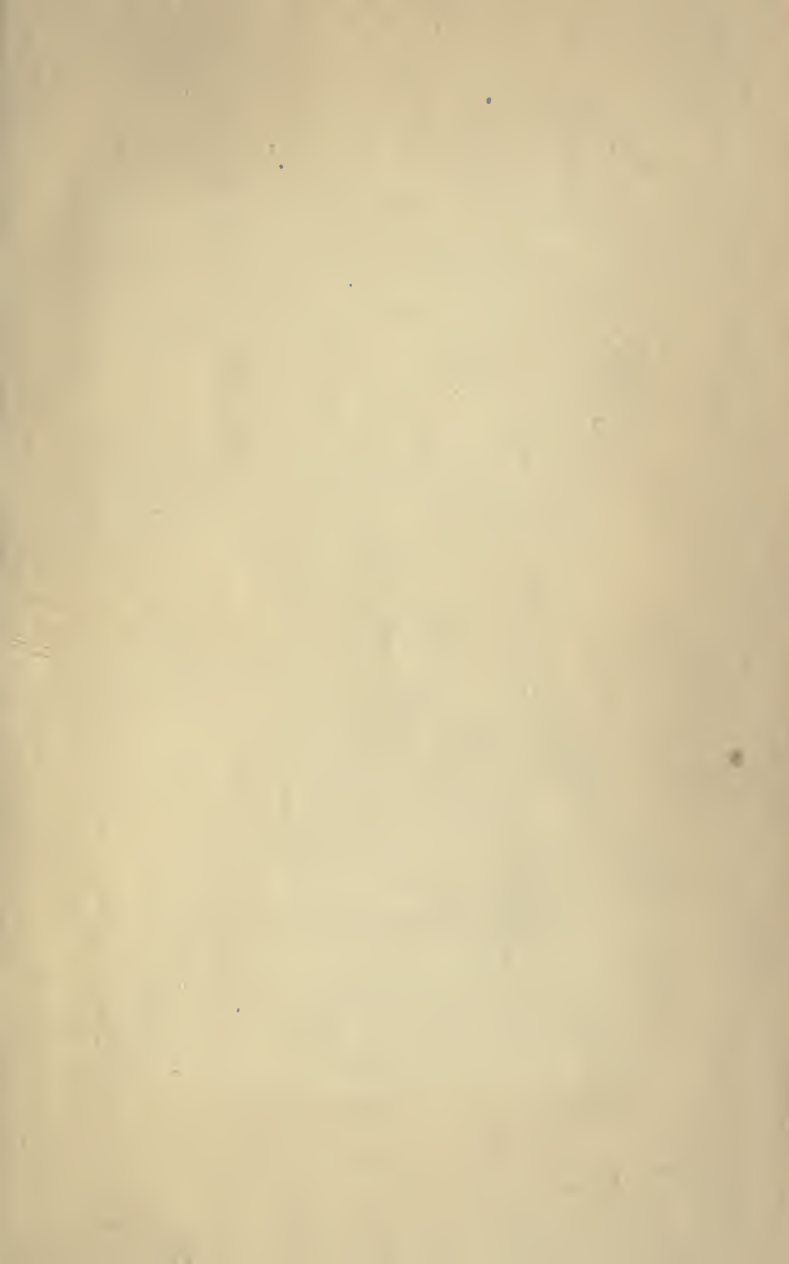
So they all made promise, and then Sir Launcelot received his Creator and, that very day, in the forty-ninth year of his life, as the book saith, he yielded up his spirit to God. And, on the selfsame day that he died, came Sir Hector, his brother, from Guienne, for he had long sought tidings and in vain of Sir Launcelot; and, when he saw him thus dead and so changed that no man might know him, he wept greatly.

So they placed his body in a horse-bier and set forth for Joyous Garde and, within sixteen days, they came thither. Then on the day next following, the great stone that was in the midst of the chapel was raised from the place where it lay and the body of Sir Launcelot was put to rest beside the

bodies of the lady Elaine and Sir Galahad. Then, when this was done, and when the stone had been put back in its place, Sir Hector stood upon the stone and, with his helm in his hand, said before them all :

" Ah ! my most noble brother Sir Launcelot, now do we truly mourn for thee as for one on whom men may not readily look again, for thou wert the greatest of all Christian knights that ever yet lived, and never wert thou matched of earthly knight's hands. And thou wert the most courteous knight that ever bore shield ; and thou wert the truest friend that ever bestrode horse ; and thou wert the truest knight that ever loved woman ; and thou wert the kindest man that ever strake with sword ; and thou wert the goodliest person ever seen among knights ; and thou wert the meekest man and the gentlest that ever sat in hall amongst ladies ; and thou wert the sternest knight to traitors that ever laid spear in rest."

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